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Ethical Decision Making and Behavior

As we practice resolving dilemmas we find ethics to be less a goal than a pathway, less a destination than a trip, less an inoculation than a process.

—Ethicist Rushworth Kidder

WHAT'S AHEAD

This chapter surveys the components of ethical behavior—moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character—and introduces systematic approaches to ethical problem solving. We'll take a look at four decision-making formats: Kidder's ethical checkpoints, the SAD formula, Nash's 12 questions, and the case study method. After presenting each approach, I'll discuss its relative advantages and disadvantages.

Understanding how we make and follow through on ethical decisions is the first step to making better choices; taking a systematic approach is the second. We'll explore both of these steps in this chapter. After examining the ethical decision-making process, we'll see how guidelines or formats can guide our ethical deliberations.

Components of Moral Action

There are a number of models of ethical decision making and action. For example, business ethics educators Charles Powers and David Vogel identify six factors or elements that underlie moral reasoning and behavior and that are particularly relevant in organizational settings.¹ The first is *moral imagination*, the recognition that even routine choices and relationships have an ethical dimension. The second is *moral identification and ordering*, which, as the name suggests, refers to the ability to identify important issues, determine priorities, and sort out competing values. The third factor is *moral evaluation*, or using analytical skills to evaluate options. The fourth element is *tolerating moral disagreement and ambiguity*, which arises when managers disagree about values and courses of action. The fifth is the ability to *integrate managerial competence with moral competence*. This integration involves anticipating possible ethical dilemmas, leading others in ethical decision making, and making sure any decision becomes part of an organization's systems and procedures. The sixth and final element is a sense of *moral obligation*, which serves as a motivating force to engage in moral judgment and to implement decisions.

James Rest of the University of Minnesota developed what may be the most widely used model of moral behavior. Rest built his four-component model by working backward. He started with the end product—moral action—and then determined the steps that produce such behavior. He concluded that ethical action is the result of four psychological subprocesses: (1) moral sensitivity (recognition), (2) moral judgment, (3) moral focus (motivation), and (4) moral character.²

Component 1: Moral Sensitivity (Recognition)

Moral sensitivity (recognizing the presence of an ethical issue) is the first step in ethical decision making because we can't solve a moral problem unless we first know that one exists. A great many moral failures stem from ethical insensitivity. The safety committee at Ford Motor decided not to fix the defective gas tank on the Pinto automobile (see Chapter 2) because members saw no problem with saving money rather than human lives. Wal-Mart was slow to respond to concerns raised by employees, labor groups, environmentalists, and others about wage violations, sexual discrimination, poor environmental practices, and other issues.³ Many students, focused on finishing their degrees, see no problem with cheating. (You can test your ethical sensitivity by completing the "Self-Assessment: Moral Sensitivity Scenarios.")

According to Rest, problem recognition requires that we consider how our behavior affects others, identify possible courses of action, and determine the

consequences of each potential strategy. Empathy and perspective skills are essential to this component of moral action. If we understand how others might feel or react, we are more sensitive to potential negative effects of our choices and can better predict the likely outcomes of each option.

A number of factors prevent us from recognizing ethical issues. We may not factor ethical considerations into our typical ways of thinking or mental models.⁴ We may be reluctant to use moral terminology (*values, justice, right, wrong*) to describe our decisions because we want to avoid controversy or believe that keeping silent will make us appear strong and capable.⁵ We may even deceive ourselves into thinking that we are acting morally when we are clearly not, a process called *ethical fading*. The moral aspects of a decision fade into the background if we use euphemisms to disguise unethical behavior, numb our consciences through repeated misbehavior, blame others, and claim that only we know the “truth.”⁶

Fortunately, we can take steps to enhance our ethical sensitivity (and the sensitivity of our fellow leaders and followers) by doing the following:

- Active listening and role playing
- Imagining other perspectives
- Stepping back from a situation to determine whether it has moral implications
- Using moral terminology to discuss problems and issues
- Avoiding euphemisms
- Refusing to excuse misbehavior
- Accepting personal responsibility
- Practicing humility and openness to other points of view

In addition to these steps, we can also increase ethical sensitivity by making an issue more salient. The greater the moral intensity of an issue, the more likely it is that decision makers will take note of it and respond ethically.⁷ We can build moral intensity by doing the following:

- Illustrating that the situation can cause significant harm or benefit to many people (magnitude of consequences)
- Establishing that there is social consensus or agreement that a behavior is moral or immoral (e.g., legal or illegal, approved or forbidden by a professional association)
- Demonstrating probability of effect, that the act will happen and will cause harm or benefit
- Showing that the consequences will happen soon (temporal immediacy)
- Emphasizing social, psychological, physical, or psychological closeness (proximity) with those affected by our actions
- Proving that one person or a group will greatly suffer due to a decision (concentration of effect)

Finally, paying attention to our emotions can be an important clue that we are faced with an ethical dilemma. Moral emotions are part of our makeup as humans.⁸ These feelings are triggered even when we do not have a personal stake in an event. For example, we may feel angry when reading about mistreatment of migrant workers or sympathy when we see a picture of a refugee living in a squalid camp. Moral emotions also encourage us to take action that benefits other people and society as a whole. We might write a letter protesting the poor working conditions of migrant laborers, for instance, or send money to a humanitarian organization working with displaced persons.

Anger, disgust, and contempt are *other-condemning* emotions. They are elicited by unfairness, betrayal, immorality, cruelty, poor performance, and status differences. Anger can motivate us to redress injustices like racism, oppression, and poverty. Disgust encourages us to set up rewards and punishments to deter inappropriate behaviors. Contempt generally causes us to step back from others. Shame, embarrassment, and guilt are *self-conscious emotions* that encourage us to obey the rules and uphold the social order. These feelings are triggered when we violate norms and social conventions, present the wrong image to others, and fail to live up to moral guidelines. Shame and embarrassment can keep us from engaging in further damaging behavior and may drive us to withdraw from social contact. Guilt motivates us to help others and to treat them well.

Sympathy and compassion are *other-suffering emotions*. They are elicited when we perceive suffering or sorrow in our fellow human beings. Such feelings encourage us to comfort, help, and alleviate the pain of others. Gratitude, awe, and elevation are *other-praising (positive) emotions* that open us up to new opportunities and relationships. They are prompted when someone has done something on our behalf, when we run across moral beauty (acts of charity, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, for example), and when we read or hear about moral exemplars (see Chapter 3). Gratitude motivates us to repay others; awe and elevation encourage us to become better persons and to take steps to help others.

In sum, if we experience anger, disgust, guilt, sympathy, or other moral emotions, the chances are good that there is an ethical dimension to the situation that confronts us. We will need to look further to determine if this is indeed the case.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

MORAL SENSITIVITY SCENARIOS

Instructions

Read each vignette and consider the following statement:

There are very important ethical aspects to this situation. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Then briefly explain your rating for each vignette in the space below it. For more information on the ethical issues raised by the scenarios, see Item 1 under "For Further Exploration, Challenge, and Self-Assessment."

Vignette 1

One of your most important customers, a medical clinic, called yesterday. The clinic had ordered a product 10 days ago (products are normally delivered within 7–10 days), but it had not arrived. Quickly, you traced the order to the shipping office. You asked the shipping clerk about the order, and she said, "I shipped it 2 days ago!" As you left the shipping office, you glanced at her desk and saw her shipping receipts. You could clearly see that the order was shipped this morning. You called the client back with the news that the product was on its way. As you talked with the client, you learned that the delay of the product had allowed the condition of some patients to worsen quite dramatically.

Vignette 2

Last Monday, you were sitting at your desk examining a request that a customer had just faxed to you. The customer was proposing a project that would make a tremendous amount of money for your company but had an extremely demanding time schedule. Just as you were about to call the customer and accept the project, one of your employees, Phil, knocked on the door. He entered your office, politely placed a letter of resignation on your desk, and told you he was sorry, but in two weeks, he

would be moving to another state to be closer to his ailing parents. After he left, you thought about the proposed project and determined that even though Phil would be gone, you could still meet all of the customer's deadlines. You called the customer and accepted the project.

Vignette 3

Earlier today, a salesman who works in Iowa called you and told you about an experience he had last week. One of his customers placed a small order of about \$1,500 worth of product from corporate headquarters. The home office immediately shipped the package through a freight company, and it arrived the next day at the freight company's warehouse in Iowa. The salesman went to the warehouse just as it was closing and talked to one of the managers. The manager said that everyone had gone home for the day, but he assured him that the package would be delivered directly to his office the next day. The salesman knew that the customer did not need the materials for at least another 3 days, but he didn't want to wait. He placed a \$20 bill on the counter and asked the warehouse manager one last time if there was anything he could do. The manager found the paperwork, got the product from the back of the warehouse, and brought it out to the salesman.

SOURCE: Reynolds, S. J. (2006). Moral awareness and ethical predispositions: Investigating the role of individual differences in the recognition of moral issues. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 233–243. Published by the American Psychological Association.

Component 2: Moral Judgment

Once an ethical problem is identified, decision makers select a course of action from the options generated in Component 1. In other words, they make judgments about what is the right or wrong thing to do in this situation.

Moral judgment has generated more research than the other components of Rest's model. Investigators have been particularly interested in cognitive moral development, the process by which people develop their moral reasoning abilities over time. Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg argued that individuals progress through a series of moral stages just as they do physical ones.⁹ Each stage is more advanced than the one before. Not only do people engage in more complex reasoning as they progress up the stages, but they also become less self-centered and develop broader definitions of morality.

Kohlberg identified three levels of moral development, each divided into two stages. Level I, *preconventional* thinking, is the most primitive and focuses on consequences. This form of moral reasoning is common among children who choose to obey to avoid punishment (Stage 1) or follow the rules in order to meet their interests (Stage 2). Stage 2 thinkers are interested in getting a fair deal: You help me, and I'll help you.

Conventional thinkers (Level II) look to others for guidance when deciding how to act. Stage 3 people want to live up to the expectations of those they respect, such as parents, siblings, and friends, and value concern for others and respect. Stage 4 individuals take a somewhat broader perspective, looking to society as a whole for direction. They believe in following rules at work, for example, and the law. Kohlberg found that most adults are Level II thinkers.

Level III, *postconceptual* or *principled* reasoning, is the most advanced type of ethical thinking. Stage 5 people are guided by utilitarian principles. They are concerned for the needs of the entire group and want to make sure that rules and laws serve the greatest good for the greatest number. Stage 6 people operate according to internalized, universal principles such as justice, equality, and human dignity. These principles consistently guide their behavior and take precedence over the laws of any particular society. According to Kohlberg, fewer than 20% of American adults ever reach Stage 5, and almost no one reaches Stage 6.

Critics take issue with both the philosophical foundation of Kohlberg's model and its reliance on concrete stages of moral development.¹⁰ They contend that Kohlberg based his postconventional stage on Rawls's justice-as-fairness theory and made deontological ethics superior to other ethical approaches. They note that the model applies more to societal issues than to individual ethical decisions. A great many psychologists challenge the notion

that people go through a rigid or “hard” series of moral stages, leaving one stage completely behind before moving to the next. They argue instead that a person can engage in many ways of thinking about a problem, regardless of age.

Rest (who studied under Kohlberg), Darcia Narvaez, and their colleagues responded to the critics by replacing the hard stages with a staircase of developmental schemas.¹¹ Schemas are networks of knowledge organized around life events. We use schemas when encountering new situations or information. You are able to master information in new classes, for instance, by using strategies you developed in previous courses. According to this “neo-Kohlbergian” approach, decision makers develop more sophisticated moral schemas as they develop. The least sophisticated schema is based on personal interest. People at this level are concerned only with what they may gain or lose in an ethical dilemma. No consideration is given to the needs of broader society. Those who reason at the next level, the maintaining norms schema, believe they have a moral obligation to maintain social order. They are concerned with following rules and laws and making sure that regulations apply to everyone. These thinkers believe that there is a clear hierarchy with carefully defined roles (e.g., bosses–subordinates, teachers–students, officers–enlisted personnel). The postconventional schema is the most advanced level of moral reasoning. Thinking at this level is not limited to one ethical approach, as Kohlberg argued, but encompasses many different philosophical traditions. Postconventional individuals believe that moral obligations are to be based on shared ideals, should not favor some people at the expense of others, and are open to scrutiny (testing and examination). Such thinkers reason like moral philosophers, looking behind societal norms to determine whether they serve moral purposes. (Refer to “Leadership Ethics at the Movies: *Michael Clayton*” for an example of a leader who shifts to a higher level of moral reasoning.)

Rest developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to measure moral development. Subjects taking the DIT (and its successor, the DIT-2) respond to six ethical scenarios and then choose statements that best reflect the reasoning they used to come up with their choices. These statements, which correspond to the three levels of moral reasoning, are then scored. In the best-known dilemma, Heinz’s wife is dying of cancer and needs a drug he cannot afford to buy. He must decide whether to steal the drug to save her life.

Hundreds of studies using the DIT reveal that moral reasoning generally increases with age and education.¹² Undergraduate and graduate students benefit from their educational experiences in general and ethical coursework in particular. When education stops, moral development stops. In addition, moral development is a universal concept, crossing cultural boundaries.

Principled leaders can boost the moral judgment of a group by encouraging members to adopt more sophisticated ethical schemas.¹³

Models of cognitive development provide important insights into the process of ethical decision making. First, contextual variables play an important role in shaping ethical behavior. Most people look to others as well as to rules and regulations when making ethical determinations. They are more likely to make wise moral judgments if coworkers and supervisors encourage and model ethical behavior. As leaders, we need to build ethical environments. (We'll take a closer look at the formation of ethical groups and organizations in Chapters 8 and 9.) Second, education fosters moral reasoning. Pursuing a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree can promote your moral development. As part of your education, focus as much attention as you can on ethics (i.e., take ethics courses, discuss ethical issues in groups and classes, reflect on the ethical challenges you experience in internships). Third, a broader perspective is better. Consider the needs and viewpoints of others outside your immediate group or organization; determine what is good for the local area, the larger society, and the global community. Fourth, moral principles produce superior solutions. The best ethical thinkers base their choices on widely accepted ethical guidelines. Do the same by drawing on important ethical approaches such as utilitarianism, the categorical imperative, altruism, communitarianism, and justice-as-fairness theory.



LEADERSHIP ETHICS AT THE MOVIES

MICHAEL CLAYTON

Key Cast Members: George Clooney, Tilda Swinton, Tom Wilkinson, Sydney Pollack

Synopsis: George Clooney stars as Michael Clayton, the "fixer" for a large New York City firm. Clayton takes care of any messes involving clients, like hit-and-run accidents and shoplifting charges. When the firm's top litigator (played by Wilkinson) begins to work for the other side in a \$3 billion lawsuit, Clayton must get him back on his medications and under control. Karen Crowder (Swinton) is chief counsel for the conglomerate being sued for manufacturing a toxic chemical. She decides to permanently silence both the rogue lawyer and Clayton. The fixer, whose life and reputation have been tarnished by a series of poor ethical and business choices, must now decide how to respond to illegal wiretapping and murder. Swinton won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her

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performance as the ambitious attorney who decides that corporate survival takes precedence over human life.

Rating: R for language, including sexual dialogue

Themes: moral reasoning, the dark side of leadership, corruption, greed, character, deception

Discussion Starters

1. What factors motivated Clayton to become a “fixer” and the conglomerate’s chief counsel to protect her company at any cost?
2. Was it unethical for the law firm’s top litigator to begin to work for the plaintiffs? Why or why not?
3. What accounts for Clayton’s shift to a higher level of moral reasoning?

Component 3: Moral Focus (Motivation)

After concluding what course of action is best, decision makers must be focused (motivated to follow through) on their choices. Moral values often conflict with other significant values. For instance, an accounting supervisor who wants to blow the whistle on illegal accounting practices at her firm must balance her desire to do the right thing against her desire to keep her job, provide income for her family, and maintain relationships with her fellow workers. She will report the accounting abuses to outside authorities only if moral considerations take precedence over these competing priorities.

Psychologists report that self-interest and hypocrisy undermine moral motivation.¹⁴ Sometimes individuals genuinely want to do the right thing, but their integrity is “overpowered” when they discover that they will have to pay a personal cost for acting in an ethical manner. Others never intend to follow an ethical course of action but engage in *moral hypocrisy* instead. These decision makers “want to appear moral while, if possible, avoiding the cost of actually being moral.”¹⁵ In experimental settings, they say that assignments should be distributed fairly but then assign themselves the most desirable tasks while giving less desirable chores to others. Both self-interest and hypocrisy encourage leaders to set their moral principles aside. For example, corporate executives may declare that lower-level employees deserve higher wages. However, whether they really want to help workers or

just want to appear as if they do, these executives are not likely to pay employees more if it means that they will earn less as a result.

Rewards play an important role in ethical follow-through. People are more likely to give ethical values top priority when rewarded through raises, promotions, public recognition, and other means for doing so. Conversely, moral motivation drops when the reward system reinforces unethical behavior.¹⁶ Unfortunately, misplaced rewards are all too common, as in the case of electronics retailers who reward employees for selling expensive extended warranties on new products. Such warranties are generally a bad deal for consumers.

Emotions also play a part in moral motivation.¹⁷ As noted earlier, sympathy, disgust, guilt, and other moral emotions prompt us to take action. We can use their motivational force to help us punish wrongdoers, address injustice, provide assistance, and so on. Other researchers report that positive emotions such as joy and happiness make people more optimistic and more likely to live out their moral choices and to help others. Depression, on the other hand, lowers motivation, and jealousy, rage, and envy contribute to lying, revenge, stealing, and other antisocial behaviors.

To increase your moral motivation and the moral motivation of followers, seek out and create ethically rewarding environments. Make sure the reward system of an organization supports ethical behavior before joining it as an employee or a volunteer. Try to reduce the costs of behaving morally by instituting policies and procedures that make it easier to report unethical behavior, combat discrimination, and so on. Work to align rewards with desired behavior in your current organization. Be concerned about how goals are reached. If all else fails, reward yourself. Take pride in following through on your choices and on living up to your self-image as a person of integrity. Tap into moral emotions while making a conscious effort to control negative feelings and to put yourself in a positive frame of mind.

Component 4: Moral Character

Executing the plan of action takes character. Moral agents have to overcome opposition, resist distractions, cope with fatigue, and develop tactics and strategies for reaching their goals. This helps explain why there is only a moderate correlation between moral judgment and moral behavior. Many times deciding does not lead to doing.

The positive character traits described in Chapter 3 contribute to ethical follow-through. Courage helps leaders implement their plans despite the risks and costs of doing so while prudence helps them choose the best course of

action. Integrity encourages leaders to be true to themselves and their choices. Humility forces leaders to address limitations that might prevent them from taking action. Reverence promotes self-sacrifice. Optimism equips leaders to persist in the face of obstacles and difficulties. Compassion and justice focus the attention of leaders on the needs of others rather than on personal priorities.

In addition to virtues, other personal characteristics contribute to moral action.¹⁸ Those with a strong will, as well as confidence in themselves and their abilities, are more likely to persist. The same is true for those with an internal locus of control. Internally oriented people (internals) believe that they have control over their lives and can determine what happens to them. Externally oriented people (externals) believe that life events are beyond their control and are the product of fate or luck instead. Because they have personal responsibility for their actions, internals are more motivated to do what is right. Externals are more susceptible to situational pressures and therefore less likely to persist in ethical tasks.

Successful implementation also requires competence. For instance, modifying the organizational reward system may entail researching, organizing, arguing, networking, and relationship-building skills. These skills are put to maximum use when actors have an in-depth understanding of the organizational context: important policies, the group's history and culture, informal leaders, and so on.

Following the character-building guidelines presented in Chapter 3 will go a long way to helping you build the virtues you need to put your moral choices into action. You may also want to look at your past performance to see why you succeeded or failed. Believe that you can have an impact. Otherwise, you are probably not going to carry through when obstacles surface. Develop your skills so that you can better put your moral choice into action and master the context in which you operate.

Decision-Making Formats

Decision-making guidelines or formats can help us make better ethical choices. Taking a systematic approach encourages teams and individuals to carefully define the problem, gather information, apply ethical standards and values, identify and evaluate alternative courses of action, and follow through on their choices. They're also better equipped to defend their decisions. Four ethical decision-making formats are described in the pages to come. All four approaches are useful. You may want to use just one or a combination of all of them. The particular format you use is not as important as using a systematic approach to moral reasoning. You can practice these guidelines by applying them to Case Study 7.1 and the scenarios described at the end of the chapter.

You will probably find it difficult at first to follow a format. That's because using a format takes a significant amount of effort, and we are used to making rapid judgments mentally when faced with ethical choices.¹⁹ Without being conscious of the fact, we quickly invoke decision-making rules we have learned through experience, such as "it is always good to obey authority" or "always be as fair as possible." Or we intuitively come to a rapid decision based on our emotions and cultural background. Often these quick responses are good ones. But not always. There may be times, for instance, when authority needs to be disobeyed or fairness must be set aside for compassion. Our intuitions are wrong when they are based on mistaken cultural beliefs. For example, many Americans used to immediately condemn interracial couples. As time passed, society recognized that this reaction was biased, unfounded, and unjust.

I suggest that, when confronted with ethical dilemmas like those in Case Study 7.1, you write down your initial reaction before using a format. Later compare your final decision to your immediate response. Your ultimate conclusion after following a series of steps may be the same as your first judgment. Or you might find that you come to a significantly different decision. In any case, you should be comfortable with your solution because your deliberations were informed both by your preconscious experiences, emotions, and intuitions as well as by your conscious reasoning.²⁰

CASE STUDY 7.1

PARKING LOT SHOOTING

Over the past year several employees of a national fast-food chain have been shot or injured when intervening in fights or crimes occurring in the restaurant's parking lots. As a result, corporate headquarters drafted a new policy that forbids workers from leaving the building in such emergencies, instructing them instead to dial 911. Those who violate the policy will immediately be fired.

Imagine that you are day-shift manager at one of the company's locations where a shooting has occurred. You call 911 but notice that the victim, who is lying right outside the door, is bleeding profusely. No one else is stepping up to help the injured man. You have first-aid training and believe you can stabilize his condition before the ambulance arrives. The shooter has apparently fled the scene.

Would you disobey company policy and help the shooting victim?

Kidder's Ethical Checkpoints

Ethicist Rushworth Kidder suggests that nine steps or checkpoints can help bring order to otherwise confusing ethical issues.²¹

1. *Recognize that there is a problem.* This step is critically important because it forces us to acknowledge that there is an issue that deserves our attention and helps us separate moral questions from disagreements about manners and social conventions. For example, being late for a party may be bad manners and violate cultural expectations. However, this act does not translate into a moral problem involving right or wrong. On the other hand, deciding whether to accept a kickback from a supplier is an ethical dilemma.
2. *Determine the actor.* Once we've determined that there is an ethical issue, we then need to decide who is responsible for addressing the problem. I may be concerned that the owner of a local business treats his employees poorly. Nonetheless, unless I work for the company or buy its products, there is little I can do to address this situation.
3. *Gather the relevant facts.* Adequate, accurate, and current information is important for making effective decisions of all kinds, including ethical ones. Details do make a difference. In deciding whether it is just to suspend a student for fighting, for instance, a school principal will want to hear from teachers, classmates, and the offender to determine the seriousness of the offense, the student's reason for fighting, and the outcome of the altercation. The administrator will probably be more lenient if this is the offender's first offense and he was defending himself.
4. *Test for right-versus-wrong issues.* A choice is generally a poor one if it gives you a negative, gut-level reaction (the stench test), would make you uncomfortable if it appeared on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper (the front-page test), or would violate the moral code of someone that you care a lot about (the Mom test). If your decision violates any of these criteria, you had better reconsider.
5. *Test for right-versus-right values.* Many ethical dilemmas pit two core values against each other. Determine whether two good or right values are in conflict with one another in this situation. Right-versus-right value clashes include the following:
 - Truth telling versus loyalty to others and institutions. Telling the truth may threaten our allegiance to another person or to an organization, such as when leaders and followers are faced with the decision of whether to blow the whistle on organizational misbehavior (see Chapter 5). Kidder believes that truth versus loyalty is the most common type of conflict involving two deeply held values.

- Personal needs versus the needs of the community. Our desire to serve our immediate group or ourselves can run counter to the needs of the larger group or community.
 - Short-term benefits versus long-term negative consequences. Sometimes satisfying the immediate needs of the group (giving a hefty pay raise to employees, for example) can lead to long-term negative consequences (endangering the future of the business).
 - Justice versus mercy. Being fair and even-handed may conflict with our desire to show love and compassion.
6. *Apply the ethical standards and perspectives.* Apply the ethical principle that is most relevant and useful to this specific issue. Is it communitarianism? Utilitarianism? Kant's categorical imperative? A combination of perspectives?
 7. *Look for a third way.* Sometimes seemingly irreconcilable values can be resolved through compromise or the development of a creative solution. Negotiators often seek a third way to bring competing factions together. Such was the case in the deliberations that produced the Camp David peace accord. Egypt demanded that Israel return land on the West Bank seized in the 1967 War. Israel resisted because it wanted a buffer zone to protect its security. The dispute was settled when Egypt pledged that it would not attack Israel again. Assured of safety, the Israelis agreed to return the territory to Egypt.²²
 8. *Make the decision.* At some point we need to step up and make the decision. This seems a given (after all, the point of the whole process is to reach a conclusion). However, we may be mentally exhausted from wrestling with the problem, get caught up in the act of analysis, or lack the necessary courage to come to a decision. In Kidder's words,

At this point in the process, there's little to do but decide. That requires moral courage—an attribute essential to leadership and one that, along with reason, distinguishes humanity most sharply from the animal world. Little wonder, then, that the exercise of ethical decision-making is often seen as the highest fulfillment of the human condition.²³
 9. *Revisit and reflect on the decision.* Learn from your choices. Once you've moved on to other issues, stop and reflect. What lessons emerged from this case that you can apply to future decisions? What ethical issues did it raise?

Balance Sheet

Advantages (Pros)

- Is thorough
- Considers problem ownership

- Emphasizes the importance of getting the facts straight
- Recognizes that dilemmas can involve right–right as well as right–wrong choices
- Encourages the search for creative solutions
- Sees ethical decision making as a learning process

Weaknesses (Cons)

- It is not easy to determine who has the responsibility for solving a problem
- The facts are not always available, or there may not be enough time to gather them
- Decisions don't always lead to action

There is a lot to be said for Kidder's approach to ethical decision making. For one thing, he seems to cover all the bases, beginning with defining the issue all the way through to learning from the situation after the dust has settled. He acknowledges that there are some problems that we can't do much about and that we need to pay particular attention to gathering as much information as possible. The ethicist recognizes that some decisions involve deciding between two "goods" and leaves the door open for creative solutions. Making a choice can be an act of courage, as Kidder points out, and we can apply lessons learned in one dilemma to future problems.

On the flip side, some of the strengths of Kidder's model can also be seen as weaknesses. As we'll see in Chapter 10, determining responsibility or ownership of a problem is getting harder in an increasingly interdependent world. Who is responsible for poor labor conditions in third-world countries, for instance? The manufacturer? The subcontractor? The store that sells the products made in sweatshops? Those who buy the items? Kidder also seems to assume that leaders will have the time to gather necessary information. Unfortunately, in situations like that described in Case Study 7.1, time is in short supply. Finally, the model seems to equate deciding with doing. As we saw in our earlier discussion of moral action, we can decide on a course of action but not follow through. Kidder is right to say that making ethical choices takes courage. However, it takes even more courage to put the choice into effect.

The SAD Formula

Media ethicist Louis Alvin Day of Louisiana State University developed the SAD formula in order to build important elements of critical thinking into moral reasoning. Critical thinking is a rational approach to decision making

that emphasizes careful analysis and evaluation. It begins with an understanding of the subject to be evaluated; moves to identifying the issues, information, and assumptions surrounding the problem; and then concludes with evaluating alternatives and reaching a conclusion.²⁴

Each stage of the SAD formula—situation definition, analysis of the situation, decision—addresses a component of critical thinking. (See Box 7.1.) To demonstrate this model, I'll use a conflict involving mandatory vaccinations of health care workers.²⁵

Situation Definition

Health care professionals are at risk for contracting infectious diseases and spreading them to their patients. For that reason, the U.S. government determined that health care workers should be one of the first groups to receive flu vaccines such as the one designed to combat the H1N1 (swine flu) virus. Vaccination can reduce the likelihood of catching the flu by 70%–80% and is one of the best ways to prevent a pandemic. However, fewer than half of U.S. health workers get flu shots every year (rates are also low in Great Britain and Hong Kong). Medical personnel who fail to be vaccinated often do so for the same reasons as other Americans. They don't like shots, it is not convenient to get them, they claim they seldom get sick, or they believe the vaccine makes them ill (though scientists deny that this happens).

Health officials have tried a variety of strategies to increase the percentage of doctors and nurses receiving vaccinations, including promotional campaigns and prize drawings. However, these voluntary efforts have fallen short. Concerned about low participation rates, particularly in light of the danger posed by the swine flu, Hospital Corporation of America, MedStar Health (Maryland), Virginia Mason (Seattle, WA), BJC HealthCare (St. Louis, MO), and the state of New York began mandatory vaccination programs. A number of clinics and doctor's offices followed suit. Employees were told they would lose their jobs if they did not get the vaccine. Exceptions were made for those likely to have an allergic reaction (eggs are used in the production of the shots) or those with religious objections. Some health care workers and their unions immediately protested the stricter vaccination policies, labeling such programs as intrusive violations of individual rights.

Day says that the ethical question to be addressed should be as narrow as possible. In our example, we will seek to answer the following query: *Are mandatory flu-vaccination policies for health care workers ethically justified?*

BOX 7.1 THE MORAL REASONING PROCESS

Situation Definition

Description of facts
 Identification of principles and values
 Statement of ethical issue or question



Analysis

Weighing of competing principles and values
 Consideration of external factors
 Examination of duties to various parties
 Discussion of applicable ethical theories



Decision

Rendering of moral agent's decision
 Defense of that decision based on moral theory

SOURCE: From *Day*. *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, 5E. Copyright © 2006 Wadsworth, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission www.cengage.com/permissions.

Analysis

Evaluation of Values and Principles. Competing principles and values are clearly present in this situation. On the one side, medical administrators and public health officials put a high value on the responsibility of medical personnel to patients and argue that mandatory vaccinations will save lives, particularly those of vulnerable populations like the sick, those with compromised immune systems, pregnant women, the very young, and the elderly. In requiring mandatory vaccinations in New York, the state's health commissioner asserted: "The rationale begins with health-care ethics, which is: The patient's well-being comes ahead of the personal preferences of health-care workers."²⁶ (The commissioner later rescinded his edict when there was a shortage of the vaccine.) The chief medical officer of MedStar Health said the decision to require vaccinations "is all about patient safety." On the other side of the debate are individuals, employee unions, and groups

who put their priority on individual rights. They believe that making flu shots a condition of employment takes away the right to make personal medical decisions, and they have concerns about the safety of the vaccines despite the assurances of medical experts. Opponents also worry that mandatory programs will spread from the health care sector into other areas of society. Said a representative of an organization wanting to limit government expansion, “You start with health-care workers but then expand that umbrella to make it mandatory for everybody. It’s all part of an encroachment on our liberties.”²⁷

External Factors. Some influenza strains, like H1N1, pose greater risks than other strains and spread more rapidly, making vaccinations even more important. Medical employees already have to be inoculated for other conditions like mumps, measles, and tuberculosis, and there haven’t been widespread protests about these requirements. In addition, medical personnel have to follow such mandatory safety procedures as washing their hands before surgery. Vaccinations appear to be a safety measure like hand washing. However, past inoculation programs have made some medical professionals skeptical about current efforts. Earlier vaccines did make recipients sore and could cause mild flu-like symptoms. The H1N1 vaccine seemed to be rushed into production, raising concerns that recipients were serving as “guinea pigs.” Nurses, doctors, and home health givers, like other Americans, are increasingly worried about substances they put in their bodies.

Moral Duties or Loyalties. Professor Day borrows from theologian Ralph Potter for this part of his model. Potter believes we need to take into account important duties or loyalties when making ethical choices.²⁸ In this case, the following duties have to be kept in mind:

- Loyalty to self (individual conscience)
- Loyalty to patients
- Loyalty to vulnerable populations
- Loyalty to fellow employees
- Loyalty to others in the same profession
- Loyalty to the public

Medical officials seem primarily concerned for patients, vulnerable populations, and the larger community. Low vaccination rates threaten patients and clients and help the virus spread. Health care workers who refuse flu shots also damage the credibility of the medical profession. Why should patients be vaccinated if their doctors and nurses don’t think it is safe

or necessary to do so? Vaccination objectors are more concerned for their individual rights and, in some cases, their personal safety. They seem to overlook their primary duty, which is to serve their patients. Yet not all appear to be acting out of selfish motives. Some resisters are concerned about setting a precedent that could reduce the rights of their fellow citizens in the years to come.

Moral Theories. Each of the ethical perspectives outlined in Chapter 5 can be applied to this dilemma. From a utilitarian perspective, the benefit of protecting personal rights has to be weighed against the dangers of spreading the flu virus. However, the immediate benefits of slowing the virus also need to be weighed against the long-term costs—loss of individual rights and government intrusion. Based on Kant’s categorical imperative, we could ask if we would want everyone to be vaccinated (probably) or if we would want everyone to refuse to be vaccinated (probably not). However, employees who resist the mandatory shots should carry through on their decision regardless of the consequences, such as losing their jobs. Rawls’s theory could be applied to say that required vaccinations are justified because they protect the least advantaged members of society. Communitarianism also seems to support the mandatory vaccination position. Medical leaders put their emphasis on responsibility to patients, vulnerable groups, and the public. Objectors seem to emphasize individual rights rather than duties. Advocates of mandatory vaccinations have a stronger altruistic focus because such efforts are designed to reduce sickness and suffering. Opponents may argue, however, that they are demonstrating concern by protecting the rights of others.

Decision

Decisions often emerge out of careful definition and analysis of the problem. It may be clear which course of action is best after external constraints, principles, duties, and moral theories are identified and evaluated. In our example, mandatory flu vaccination programs for health care workers appear to be morally justified. Such programs put the needs of others first and reduce suffering and death. They seem consistent with other requirements placed on health care workers and support the patient-focused mission of the medical profession. Health care employees should prevent sickness, not spread it. This option also seems to be best supported by moral theory. Nonetheless, opponents of mandatory vaccination programs are right to point out that we should be cautious about requiring health

treatments. Just because mandatory influenza vaccinations are justified for health care workers does not mean that we should require all citizens to be vaccinated (that's a different question for analysis) or force citizens into other medical treatments.

Balance Sheet

Advantages (Pros)

- Encourages orderly, systematic reasoning
- Incorporates situation definition, duties, and moral theories

Disadvantages (Cons)

- Failure to reach consensus
- Limits creativity
- Ignores implementation

The SAD formula does encourage careful reasoning by building in key elements of the critical thinking process. Following the formula keeps decision makers from reaching hasty decisions. Instead of jumping immediately to solutions, they must carefully identify elements of the situation, examine and evaluate ethical alternatives, and then reach a conclusion.

Three elements of the SAD formula are particularly praiseworthy. First, the formula recognizes that the keys to solving a problem often lie in clearly identifying and describing it. Groups are far less likely to go astray when members clearly outline the question they are to answer. Second, Day's formula highlights duties or loyalties. In the case of vaccinations, prioritizing loyalties is key to supporting or opposing mandatory vaccination programs. Third, the formula incorporates moral theories directly into the decision-making process.

The strengths of the SAD model must be balanced against some troubling weaknesses. Day implies that a clear choice will emerge after the problem is defined and analyzed. Nevertheless, that may not always be the case. Even in our example, there is room for dispute. While it appears as if mandatory vaccinations are morally justified, those who put a high value on personal freedoms will likely remain unconvinced. They raise valid concerns about the long-term impact of such programs as well. Focusing on a narrowly defined question may exclude creative options and make it hard to apply principles from one decision to other settings. Finally, the formula leaves out the important implementation stage.

Nash's 12 Questions

Ethics consultant Laura Nash offers 12 questions that can help businesses and other groups identify the responsibilities involved in making moral choices.²⁹ She argues that discussions based on these queries can be useful even if the group doesn't reach a conclusion. Managers who answer the questions surface ethical concerns that might otherwise remain hidden, identify common moral problems, clarify gaps between stated values and performance, and explore a variety of alternatives.

1. *Have you defined the problem accurately?* The ethical decision-making process begins with assembling the facts. Determine how many employees will be affected by layoffs, how much the cleanup of toxic materials will cost, or how many people have been injured by faulty products. Finding out the facts can help defuse the emotionalism of some issues (perhaps the damage is not as great as first feared).
2. *How would you define the problem if you stood on the other side of the fence?* Asking how others might feel forces self-examination. From a company's point of view, expanding a local plant may make good sense by increasing production and efficiency. Government officials and neighbors might have an entirely different perspective. A larger plant means more workers clogging already overcrowded roads and contributing to urban sprawl. For example, considering the company's point of view may impact the decision you reach in "Focus on Follower Ethics: Paying Back Microsoft" on page 258.
3. *How did this situation occur in the first place?* This question separates the symptoms from the disease. Lying, cheating customers, and strained labor relations are generally symptoms of deeper problems. Firing an employee for unethical behavior is a temporary solution. Probe to discover the underlying causes. For example, many dubious accounting practices are the result of pressure to produce high quarterly profits.
4. *To whom and to what do you give your loyalties as a person or group and as a member of the organization?* As we saw in Chapter 1, conflicts of loyalty are hard to sort through. However, wrestling with the problem of ultimate loyalty (Work group? Family? Self? Corporation?) can clarify the values operating in an ethical dilemma.
5. *What is your intention in making this decision?*
6. *How does this intention compare with the likely results?* These questions probe both the group's intentions and the likely products. Honorable motives

don't guarantee positive results. Make sure that the outcomes reflect your motivations.

7. *Whom could your decision or action injure?* Too often groups consider possible injury only after being sued. Try, in advance, to determine harmful consequences. What will happen if customers ignore label warnings and spread your pesticide indiscriminately, for example? Will the guns you manufacture end up in the hands of urban gang members? Based on these determinations, you may decide to abandon your plans to make these items or revise the way they are marketed.
8. *Can you engage the affected parties in a discussion of the problem before you make your decision?* Talking to affected parties is one way to make sure that you understand how your actions will influence them. Few of us would want other people to decide what's in our best interest. Yet we often push forward with projects that assume we know what's in the best interests of others.
9. *Are you confident that your position will be as valid over a long period of time as it seems now?* Make sure that your choice will stand the test of time. What seem like compelling reasons for a decision may not seem so important months or years later. Consider the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, for instance. American intelligence experts and political leaders tied Saddam Hussein to terrorist groups and claimed that he was hiding weapons of mass destruction. After the invasion, no solid links between Iraqis and international terrorists or weapons of mass destruction were discovered. Our decision to wage this war doesn't appear as justified now as it did in the months leading up to the conflict.
10. *Could you disclose without qualm your decision or action to your boss, your CEO, the board of directors, your family, or society as a whole?* No ethical decision is too trivial to escape the disclosure test. If you or your group would not want to disclose this action, then you'd better reevaluate your choice.
11. *What is the symbolic potential of your action if understood? Misunderstood?* What you intend may not be what the public perceives (see Questions 5 and 6). If your company is a notorious polluter, contributions to local arts groups may be seen as an attempt to divert attention from your firm's poor environmental record, not as a generous civic gesture.
12. *Under what conditions would you allow exceptions to your stand?* Moral consistency is critical, but is there any basis for making an exception? Dorm rules might require that visiting hours end at midnight on weekdays. Yet, as a resident assistant, is there any time when you would be willing to overlook violations? During finals week? On the evening before classes start? When dorm residents and visitors are working on class projects?

Balance Sheet

Advantages (Pros)

- Highlights the importance of gathering facts
- Encourages perspective taking
- Forecasts results and consequences over time

Disadvantages (Cons)

- Is extremely time consuming
- May not always reach a conclusion
- Ignores implementation

Like the ethical checkpoints, the 12 questions highlight the importance of problem identification and information gathering. They go a step further, however, by encouraging us to engage in perspective taking. We need to see the problem from the other party's point of view, consider the possible injury we might cause, invite others to give us feedback, and consider how our actions will be perceived. We also need to envision results and take a long-term perspective, imagining how our decisions will stand the test of time. Stepping back can keep us from making choices we might regret later. For example, the decision to test nuclear weapons on U.S. soil without warning citizens may have seemed justified to officials waging the Cold War. However, now even the federal government admits that these tests were immoral.



FOCUS ON FOLLOWER ETHICS

PAYING BACK MICROSOFT?

Software giant Microsoft made an embarrassing error when it engaged in the first widespread layoffs in the firm's history. Company officials overpaid an average of \$4,000–\$5,000 to 25 out of the first 1,400 workers it furloughed. After discovering the error, the firm sent a letter asking for repayment from the 25 laid-off workers, requesting a check or money order and apologizing for the inconvenience.

Contents of the letter soon appeared on the Internet and in the national media. Microsoft officials then backed off their attempts to get the money back. According to a company spokesperson, "This was a mistake on our part. We should have handled this situation in a more thoughtful manner. We are reaching out to those impacted to relay that we will not seek any payment from

those individuals."¹ While Microsoft decided to drop the matter because of negative publicity, the fact remains that some employees received more than they were promised. Except for a clerical error, the company did nothing wrong and has a legal right to ask for restitution. One outplacement expert noted that just because Microsoft is a large company doesn't mean it should have to automatically pay the cost for this mistake. "What if they'd put an extra three zeros on it?" he wondered. "Of course they'd expect to get it back."²

If you were one of the laid-off workers overpaid by Microsoft, would you give the money back? Why or why not? Would your response be different if the amount of the overpayment was much bigger and the company much smaller?

Notes

1. Microsoft will not seek overpaid severance. (2009, February 23). TECHWEB.
2. Microsoft will not seek overpaid severance.

Sources

Chan, S. P. (2009, May 6). Microsoft may not be done cutting jobs. *The Seattle Times*, p. A1.

Microsoft will not seek overpaid severance. (2009, February 23). TECHWEB.

I suspect that some groups will be frustrated by the amount of time it takes to answer the 12 questions. Not only is the model detailed, but discussing the problem with affected parties could take a series of meetings over a period of weeks and months. Complex issues such as determining who should clean up river pollution involve a variety of constituencies with very different agendas (government agencies, company representatives, citizens' groups, conservation clubs). Some decision makers may also be put off by the model's ambiguity. Nash admits that experts may define problems differently, that there may be exceptions to the decision, and that groups may use the procedure and never reach a conclusion. Finally, none of the questions use the ethical standards we identified in Chapter 5 or address the problem of implementing the choice once it is made.

The Case Study Method

The case study method is widely used for making medical diagnoses. At many hospitals, groups made up of doctors, nurses, and other staff members

meet regularly to talk about particularly troublesome cases. They may be unable to determine the exact nature of the illness or how to best treat a patient. Many of these deliberations involve ethical issues such as whether to keep a terminally ill person on life support or how to respond to patients who demand unnecessary tests and procedures. The group solicits a variety of viewpoints and gathers as much information as possible. Members engage in analogical reasoning, comparing the specifics of a particular case with similar cases by describing the patient, her illness, and relationships with her family. Instead of focusing on how universal principles and standards can be applied in this situation, hospital personnel are more concerned with the details of the case itself. Participants balance competing perspectives and values, reach tentative conclusions, and look for similarities between the current case and earlier ones.

Medical ethicist and communication scholar David H. Smith argues that the case-based approach is a powerful technique because it is based on narrative or story.³⁰ When decision makers describe cases, they are telling stories. These narratives say as much about the storyteller as they do about the reality of the case. “Facts” are not objective truth but rather are reflections of what the narrator thinks is true and important. Stories knit these perceptions into a coherent whole. When discussing the fate of patients, it is not enough to know medical data. Hospital personnel need to learn about the patient’s history, the costs and benefits of various treatment options, and other factors such as the wishes of relatives and legal issues. Smith outlines the following steps for case-based decision making:

1. *Foster storytelling.* Alert participants to the fact that they will be sharing their story about the problem. Framing the discussion as a storytelling session invokes a different set of evaluation criteria than is generally used in decision making. We judge evidence based on such factors as the quality of sources and logical consistency (see the discussion of argumentation in Chapter 8). We judge stories by how believable they seem to be, how well the elements of the story fit together and mesh with what we know of the world, and the values reflected in the narrative.³¹
2. *Encourage elaboration of essential events and characters.* Details are essential to the case study method. Additional details make it easier to draw comparisons with other examples.
3. *Encourage the sharing of stories by everyone with an interest in the problem.* Bringing more perspectives to bear on the problem reveals more details. In the end, a better, shared story emerges. Consider the case of an elderly man refusing a heart operation that could extend his life. Finding out why he is rejecting the surgery is an important first step to solving this ethical dilemma. As nurses, social workers, and doctors share information, they may discover

that the patient is suffering from depression or feels cut off from his family. Addressing these problems may encourage the patient to agree to the operation and thus resolve the moral issue.

4. *Offer alternative meanings.* Change the interpretation of the story by doing the following:
 - Providing additional expert information and pointing out where the facts of the story do not fit with other facts. The first diagnosis may not be correct. Press on when needed. In the case of our patient, claims that he is alienated from his family would be rejected if his children and grandchildren visit him daily.
 - Focusing attention on the characters in the story (the patient) rather than on some overarching ethical principle such as utilitarianism or the categorical imperative.
 - Examining analogies critically to make sure they really hold. Don't assume that the reasons one patient turns down treatment are the same as those of other patients, for example.
 - Offering alternative futures that might come to pass depending on decisions made by the group. In our case, what will be the likely outcome if treatment is delayed or never given? How much will the patient improve if he has the heart operation? Will attempts to persuade him backfire, locking him into his current position? What might happen if the hospital enlists his family to force him into compliance?

Balance Sheet

Advantages (Pros)

- Is unique
- Harnesses the power of narrative and analogical reasoning
- Avoids ethical polarization; allows for ethical middle ground

Disadvantages (Cons)

- Downplays the importance of objective reality
- Details are not always available to decision makers
- Consensus on the right course of action is not always possible

The case study method is significantly different from the others presented in this chapter. These other models outline a linear, step-by-step process for resolving ethical dilemmas that call for the application of universal ethical principles or standards. The case study approach is not linear but circular, calling on participants to share a variety of perspectives. Decision makers keep ethical principles in mind but don't try to invoke them to provide the resolution to a problem. They use them as general guides instead and focus

on the case itself. Though unique, the case study method still requires decision makers to meet, systematically share information and analyze the problem, evaluate options, and reach a conclusion.

We often make choices based on stories. A good narrative is more persuasive than statistical evidence, for instance, and frequently uses the type of analogical reasoning reflected in the case study approach.³² For example, when faced with an ethical decision about whether to tell your current employer about a job offer from another firm, you probably would consider the following: (1) the details of the situation (your relationship to your immediate supervisor, how hard it will be to replace you, your loyalty to the organization); (2) similar situations or cases in your past (what happened when you revealed this information before leaving your last job); and (3) what your friends did when facing similar circumstances. The case study method takes advantage of our natural tendency to reason through story and analogy.

As I noted in the discussion of character ethics in Chapter 3, universal principles can be difficult to apply to specific situations. There always seem to be exceptions to the rule. (“In general, don’t lie, but it may be OK to lie if it protects someone else from danger.”) A strength of the case study approach is that it acknowledges that specific circumstances often shape how a general principle can be used to resolve a particular dilemma. This approach also avoids polarization caused by invoking ethical absolutes. Take the abortion debate, for example. Proponents and opponents of abortion are locked into their positions by their interpretations of such values as freedom and the sanctity of life. The case study method suggests that some middle ground can be found by examining specific cases. After all, some pro-life advocates allow abortion in cases where the mother’s life is in danger. Some in the pro-choice camp are uncomfortable with late-term abortions.

The case study approach has its downside. To begin, it minimizes objective reality. Although we always see ethical dilemmas through our perceptual filters, there do appear to be verifiable facts that ought to come into play in decision making. Crime scene evidence should be essential to determining a defendant’s guilt or innocence, for instance. Some criticized the verdict of the O. J. Simpson murder trial in the mid-1990s because they thought that the jury overlooked factual DNA evidence and accepted the story of police misconduct instead. The same evidence was offered in a later civil trial. Jurors in that case concluded that the football star was indeed guilty of murdering his ex-wife and her friend and forced him to pay damages to the families.

A practical problem with the case study method is its dependence on detail. In real life, leaders may not have the luxury of being able to solicit stories and probe for additional information. They must make decisions quickly, particularly in crises. Students face a similar problem when discussing cases in class.

Short cases, such as the ones in this text, may leave out details you think are important. Yet you have to resolve them anyway.

Finally, consensus, though likely in this format, is not guaranteed. One overall story may emerge, but it may not. This is often the case in medical diagnoses. Two doctors may reach different conclusions about what is wrong with a patient. Differences in values, perspectives, and definitions of “facts” may keep ethical decision makers apart.

Implications and Applications

- Ethical behavior is the product of moral sensitivity, (recognition), moral judgment, moral focus (motivation), and moral character.
- Increase your sensitivity to potential ethical issues through perspective taking, using moral terminology, increasing the moral intensity of issues, and being sensitive to the presence of moral emotions like anger, disgust, guilt, or sympathy.
- Improve your ability to make moral judgments by creating an ethical environment that provides ethical role models and guidelines, continuing your education with a special focus on ethics, considering the needs and perspectives of broader audiences, and basing your decisions on widely accepted moral principles and guidelines.
- Foster your moral motivation and that of followers by rewarding ethical choices, responding to moral emotions, and controlling negative feelings.
- Your chances of following through on ethical decisions (moral character) are higher if you demonstrate virtue, believe you have some control over events in your life, and develop the necessary skills to put your plan into action.
- Decision-making guidelines can help you make better ethical choices. Possible ethical decision-making formats include Kidder’s ethical checkpoints, the SAD formula, Nash’s 12 questions, and the case study method. The particular format you choose is not as important as taking a systematic approach to ethical decision making.
- Your initial reaction to an ethical dilemma, based on emotions, cultural influences, past experiences, and intuitions, can inform the conclusion you reach using a decision-making format.
- Whatever format you follow, make every effort to gather in-depth, current, and accurate information.
- Creativity is as vital in making ethical decisions as it is in generating new products and programs. Sometimes you can come up with a “third way” that resolves ethical conflicts.
- Moral dilemmas often involve clashes between two core (good) values. Common right-versus-right dilemmas are truth versus loyalty, short term versus long term, individual versus community, and justice versus mercy.
- Think of ethical deliberation as an ongoing process. You may go through a sequence of steps and use them again. Return to your decision later to evaluate

and learn from it. As soon as one ethical crisis passes, there's likely to be another on the horizon.

- Don't expect perfection. As a leader, make the best choice you can after thorough deliberation but recognize that sometimes you may have to choose between two flawed alternatives.

For Further Exploration, Challenge, and Self-Assessment

1. Analyze your scores on the moral sensitivity test found in “Self-Assessment: Moral Sensitivity Scenarios.” According to the investigator who developed these vignettes, you should have noted important ethical issues in Vignette 1, which involved significant harm to patients, and in Vignette 3, which involved bribery. Is this how you responded? Why did you answer the way you did? What do you learn from this assessment? How can you improve your sensitivity to the presence of ethical issues?
2. Apply the four-component model to the process you went through when faced with a moral dilemma. How successfully did you complete each stage? What would you do differently next time? Write up your analysis.
3. Develop a plan for improving your moral reasoning as part of your education. How can you take advantage of your college experiences to become more of a postconventional thinker?
4. Which of the four decision-making formats do you find most useful? Why?
5. In a group, brainstorm a list of possible ethical dilemmas faced by a college student. How many of these problems involve a clash between two important values (right versus right)? Identify which values are in conflict in each situation.
6. Apply each of the formats to one of the scenarios in Case Study 7.2. First reach your own conclusion based on your initial reactions without using a format and then discuss the situation in a group. See whether you can reach a consensus. Make note of the important factors dividing or uniting group members. Do you reach different conclusions depending on the system you follow?
7. Use a format from the chapter to analyze an ethical decision facing society (e.g., gay marriage or gay ordination, illegal music file sharing, illegal immigration). Write up your analysis and conclusions.

CASE STUDY 7.2**ETHICAL SCENARIOS FOR ANALYSIS*****Scenario A: Clothing the Camp Counselors***

You are a first-year counselor at a camp for needy children, which is subsidized through contributions from individuals and local businesses. Yours is the only camp experience that these disadvantaged kids will ever have. One afternoon, a few hours before the next batch of children is due to arrive, a semitruck stops by with a donated shipment of new shoes, shirts, and shorts for your campers. Immediately the other counselors (all of whom have more experience than you do) begin selecting items for personal use. They encourage you to do the same. When questioned, they argue that there is plenty to go around for both kids and counselors and that the clothes are a “fringe benefit” for underpaid camp staff.

Would you take any shoes or clothing to wear?

SOURCE: Kristina Findley, George Fox University.

Scenario B: Penalizing Timely Payments

You are the manager at a regional center that processes credit card payments. Company profits are down because of increased competition from other card issuers that charge lower interest rates. To boost income, the firm raised its penalties for late payments and reduced the length of the billing cycle. These changes were announced to cardholders. However, at the same time, company officials made an unofficial policy change. They instructed you and managers at the other processing centers to apply late penalties when checks arrive right before the due date. In these cases it will be difficult for cardholders to prove that their payments arrived on time. Some of your colleagues at other processing centers around the country have already begun this practice, knowing that failure to do so could cost them their jobs.

Will you institute this new policy at your processing center?

Scenario C: The Blowout

You are the coach of a high school girls' basketball team. This is your best season ever, and you are getting ready for the state play-offs. You teach an aggressive brand of basketball that involves playing full-court defense and fast-breaking at every opportunity. As a result, your team scores lots of points. You tell the young women on your squad that they may not always

(Continued)

(Continued)

win but that you want them to play hard and to always strive for excellence. Your last game of the regular season is with the worst team in your league, one with many starters who had not played basketball before this year. Not only are they less experienced and talented than your players; they are much shorter as well. Within minutes the game turns into a rout. By halftime the score is 50 to 4. Some state high school athletic associations have “mercy rules” that shorten or end lopsided games. Your state does not. This is the last chance your team will have to “tune up” before moving on to much stiffer competition.

In the second half will you deliberately try to keep the score down by changing how your team plays?

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Scenario D: Would You Run These Ads?

You are the sales manager for a local radio station that has seen a dramatic downturn in ads and revenue as the local economy loses industries and small businesses. One of your biggest advertisers has been MighTY Mortgage. MighTY Mortgage spots feature the company president, Tom Tyler promising to “save our friends lots of cash.” In these commercials Tyler claims that his company offers the lowest mortgage rates and will pay to have homes appraised.

Two weeks ago state regulators charged MighTY Mortgage with a variety of unethical and illegal practices. The firm offers no proof that its loan rates are the lowest and charges enough in fees to more than cover the cost of the “free” appraisals. Investigators also found that, in most instances, MighTY failed to properly disclose loan terms to borrowers. The state wants to revoke the company’s license, fine Tyler \$250,000, and make sure the mortgage lender pays restitution to borrowers. However, final action has not been taken and won’t be for several months.

After temporarily pulling his ads, Tom Tyler wants to go back on your station’s airwaves with a new set of commercials. The new spots still promise to save listeners lots of money but no longer mention free appraisals. Instead of claiming to offer the lowest interest rate, MighTY Mortgage now says it offers a low interest rate.

Would you broadcast the new commercials for MighTY Mortgage?

SOURCE: Fictional case based on real-life events.

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