

# STEPS OF THE ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

EESE Faculty Development Workshop  
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# SUMMARY OF THE STEPS OF THE ETHICAL DECISION MAKING PROCESS

1. Gather the facts
2. Define the ethical issues
3. Identify the affected parties (stakeholders)
4. Identify the consequences
5. Identify the obligations (principles, rights, justice)
6. Consider your character and integrity
7. Think creatively about potential actions
8. Check your gut
9. Decide on the proper ethical action and be prepared to deal with opposing arguments.

# 1 - GATHER THE FACTS

- ❑ Don't jump to conclusions without the facts
- ❑ Questions to ask: Who, what, where, when, how, and why.
- ❑ However, facts may be difficult to find because of the *uncertainty* often found around ethical issues
- ❑ Some facts are not available
- ❑ Assemble as many facts as possible before proceeding
- ❑ Clarify what ***assumptions*** you are making!

## 2 – DEFINE THE ETHICAL ISSUE(S)

- Don't jump to solutions without first identifying the ***ethical issue(s)*** in the situation.
- Define the ethical basis for the issue you want to focus on.
- There may be ***multiple*** ethical issues – focus on ***one*** major one at a time.

# 3 – IDENTIFY THE AFFECTED PARTIES

- Identify all of the **stakeholders**
  - Who are the *primary* or direct stakeholders?
  - Who are the *secondary* or indirect stakeholders?
- Why are they stakeholders for the issue?
  - **Perspective-taking** -- Try to see things through the eyes of those individuals affected

# 4 – IDENTIFY THE CONSEQUENCES

- Think about potential **positive** and **negative** consequences for affected parties by the decision (Focus on primary stakeholders to simplify analysis until you become comfortable with the process).
- What are the **magnitude** of the consequences and the **probability** that the consequences will happen.
- **Short term vs. Long term** consequences – will decision be valid over time.
- Broader **systemic** consequences – tied to **symbolic** and **secrecy**
  - **Symbolic** consequences – Each decision sends a message.
  - **Secrecy** consequences – What are the consequences if the decision or action becomes public?
- Did you consider relevant **cognitive barriers/biases**?
- Consider what your **decision** would be based only on **consequences** – then move on and see if it is similar given other considerations.

# 5 – IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT PRINCIPLES, RIGHTS, AND JUSTICE ISSUES

- Obligations should be thought of in terms of principles and rights involved
  - A) What obligations are created because of particular ethical *principles* you might use in the situation?
    - ❖ Examples: Do no harm; Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; Do what you would have anyone in your shoes do in the given context.
  - B) What obligations are created because of the specific *rights* of the stakeholders?
  - What rights are more *basic vs. secondary* in nature? Which help protect an individual's basic autonomy?
  - What types of rights are involved – *negative or positive*?
  - C) What concepts of justice (fairness) are relevant – *distributive or procedural justice*?
- Did you consider any relevant **cognitive barriers/biases**?
- Formulate the appropriate **decision or action** based solely on the above analysis of these obligations.

# 6 – CONSIDER YOUR CHARACTER & INTEGRITY

- Consider what your relevant community members would consider to be the kind of decision that an *individual of integrity* would make in this situation.
- What *specific virtues* are relevant in the situation?
- **Disclosure rule** – what would you do if the *New York Times* reported your action and everyone was to read it.
- Think about how your decision will be remembered when you are gone.
- Did you consider any relevant **cognitive biases/barriers**?
- What **decision** would you come to based solely on **character** considerations?



# KU School of Business Positive Code of Conduct: R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

## Responsibility

We accept the outcomes of our own actions. Therefore, we will strive to exceed peers' and instructors' expectations, meet established deadlines for assignments, and represent the KU School of Business in a positive manner.

## Enthusiasm

We will exhibit drive and passion in daily activities and toward achieving our goals. This means engaging actively in classroom discussions, being involved in student organizations, and being committed overall to the School.

## Self-Esteem

A strong sense of self-esteem leads to an ability to respect others. This can be achieved by believing in yourself and your values, seeking out opportunities for self-development, and continually challenging yourself.

## Professional Integrity

We expect students and faculty to be trustworthy and genuine in all interactions. As part of the business school community, you must be honest and true to your word, sign and abide by the honor code and commit to your responsibilities.

## Equity

We will give back at least what we receive. This includes meeting instructors' and peers' efforts and supporting equal opportunity for all students to learn. Our sense of equity is also broader, as it extends to our commitments to the community and the environment.

## Compassion

We are committed to practicing care, empathy, and understanding toward others. As part of this, we will provide positive support, feedback and help to those who need it.

## Teamwork

To be successful, we must cooperate with team members to reach a common goal. We will create an open atmosphere where constructive ideas can be shared without criticism and will contribute ideas while respecting others on the team.

Aspire to live now by guidelines that will help you succeed  
in your professional career.

# 7 – THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Be sure you have not been unnecessarily forced into a corner
- You may have some choices or alternatives that have not been considered
- If you have come up with solutions “a” and “b,” try to brainstorm and come up with a “c” solution that might satisfy **the interests of the primary parties** involved in the situation.

# 8 – CHECK YOUR GUT

- Even though the prior steps have argued for a highly rational process, it is always good to “***check your gut.***”
- ***Intuition*** is gaining credibility as a source for good decision making – knowing something is not “right.”
  - Particularly relevant if you have a lot of experience in the area – ***expert*** decision-making.

## 9 – DECIDE ON YOUR COURSE OF ACTION AND PREPARE RESPONSES TO THOSE WHO MAY OPPOSE YOUR POSITION

- ❑ Consider potential actions based on the consequences, obligations, and character approaches.
- ❑ Do you come up with similar answers from the different perspectives?
- ❑ Do the obligation and character help you “check” the consequentialist preferred action?
- ❑ How can you protect the rights of those involved (or your own character) while still maximizing the overall good for all of the stakeholders?
- ❑ What arguments are most compelling to you to justify the action ethically? How will you respond to those with opposing viewpoints?