



ETHICS FOR EVERYONE:
Decision-making Framework

© jlenorabresler.com 2025
 J.Lenora Bresler, J.D., CSP, SHRM-SCP, SPHR

1

What is “Workplace Ethics?”

What is right or wrong in the workplace AND doing what’s right

Branch of applied ethics made up of 3 parts:

- See** (recognize the ethical dilemma)
- Know** (analyze and determine correct action)
- Do** (follow through and act ethically)

2

Why should we care?

- Private and public reputations
- Job performance evaluations increasingly incorporate ethics
- Most professions and certifications require adherence to an ethical code, breaches of which will be disciplined
- Courts are using ethical codes as guides for appropriate behavior, impacts liability and damages

3

What are the most common ethical issues that arise in the workplace?



4

Common workplace ethical issues

- Conflict of interest
- Confidentiality
- Privacy
- Respect
- Gossip
- Lying
- Stealing, including taking credit
- Shirking responsibility including failure to admit mistakes

5

Why?

Why is it sometimes difficult to maintain workplace ethics?



6

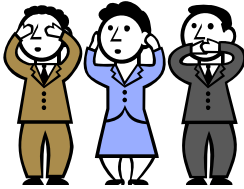
Danger: Rationalizations ahead!

Things we tell ourselves to give us permission to do what we suspect is wrong



7

Avoiding the issue



- It's not urgent.
- It's impractical.
- It's too risky.
- It's too complex.
- It's not my responsibility.
- I cannot change it.
- This is the way things are done.

8

Giving yourself permission to do something questionable

- They are a great/poor performer.
- Everyone else does it.
- It's such a little thing.
- We have the only service available.
- No one will know.
- There's no harm.
- We'll all be gone.



9

Ethical Myopia



- Just follow the rules.
- Do it fast.
- Do it easy.
- Do the "safe" thing.
- Follow my own beliefs in my work and don't worry about what others do.
- Just do what I'm told.

10

ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

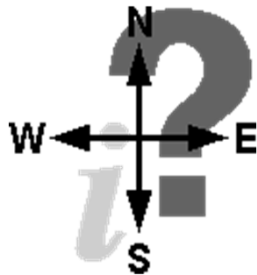
(involve others – darkness hates the light)

1. Define the *specific* ethical issue/conflict in as objective and basic language as possible.
2. Identify **internal/external factors** (e.g., legal, political, social, economic, personal bias/rationalizations) **that may influence you**.
3. Identify **key values**, prioritizing them.
4. Identify **who will be affected** and your obligation to each.
5. Select **ethical framework** to guide the decision-making process.
6. Consider alternatives, make a decision, and be able to **articulate the result *and* the process clearly and transparently**.

11

People differ in the way they approach ethical issues.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH ETHICAL DILEMMAS?



12

Common Frameworks

Deontology: **absolute universal moral rules** (Kant)

- Rights of truth, privacy, not to be injured, what of has been agreed

Ethical Relativism: **culture determines**

Utilitarianism: **greatest good for greatest number** (Bentham and Mill)

- Rule vs. Specific

Good person (virtue) ww_D?

Fairness/justice no favoritism or discrimination (Aristotle)

Broadcast test

13

ROTARY FOUR-WAY TEST

- Is it **true**?
- Is it **fair** to all concerned?
- Will it build **goodwill** and **better friendships**? (long-term sustainability)
- Will it be **beneficial** to all concerned?



14

MCDM

Multi-criteria decision-making attempts to **create metrics** by which to evaluate alternatives **PRIOR to analysis.**

Intended to assist in civil discussion, it tries to limit rationalizations and stubborn adherence to one's personal preferences and priorities.

15

Wise, considered Counsel

Get perspectives from a variety of counsel.

Don't let the urgency of the moment make bad precedent.

16

Culture

What is a "culture of ethics" and how can you create it in your workplace?



17

How to Make Workplace Ethics integral to your work

1. Develop or refer to a code with example behaviors.
2. Ensure common understanding of expectations within your own organization
3. Create performance evaluation criteria that reward attention to ethics.
4. Establish an environment in which ethics are considered in ALL decisions
5. Constantly ask if yourself and others if we are falling into ethical pitfalls.

18

Introspection and Accountability

Constantly examine yourself. (mirror)



Give others permission to hold you accountable.



19

ONE GOOD THING

What is your biggest take-away?

What *specific* thing you are going to do because of that insight?

20
