

7 STEP METHOD FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

1. STATE THE PROBLEM

"What is the main issue at stake in this case?"

2. GATHER AND ASSESS RELEVANT FACTS IN THE CASE

At this step it is important to address the non-ethical issues raised within the case. For example, one may need to know the legal constraints of the decision, technical aspects that loom large, or other issues. Since it is impossible to include all facts in a case-study, frequently you will have to make assumptions based on the information you do have.

3. IDENTIFYING THE STAKEHOLDERS

At this step, all stakeholders in the decision should be identified. As with Step 1, think broadly and generate a list of all possible individuals, groups, or entities (e.g. the environment) who will be affected by the decisions to be made.

4. DEVELOP LIST OF AT LEAST FIVE OPTIONS

Be imaginative, try to avoid "dilemma" - not "yes" or "no" but who to go to, what to say.

5. TEST OPTIONS, USING SUCH TESTS AS THE FOLLOWING:

Harm test
does this option do less harm than any alternative?

Publicity test
would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?

Defensibility test
could I defend my choice of this option before a Congressional committee, a committee of my peers, or my parents?

Reversibility test
would I still think the choice of this option good if I were one of those adversely affected by it?

Virtue test

what would I become if I choose this option often?

Colleague test

what do my colleagues say when I describe my problem and suggest this option as my solution?

Professional test
what might my profession's ethics committee say about this option?

Organization test
what does the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?

6. MAKE A TENTATIVE CHOICE BASED ON STEPS 1 -5

Did you solve the problem with which you began?

7. MAKE FINAL CHOICE (AFTER REVIEWING STEPS 1- 6), ACT, AND THEN ASK:

What could make it less likely you would have to make such a decision again?

What precautions can you take as an individual (announce policy on question, change job, etc.)?

What can you do to have more support next time (e.g., seek future allies on this issue)?

What can you do to change organization (e.g., suggest policy change at next dept. meeting)?

What can you do to change larger society (e.g. work for a new statute or EPA regulation)?

CONTACT US :

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF ETHICS IN THE PROFESSIONS

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

CSEP@IIT.EDU

312.567.3017

