

A FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

1. Facts & Issues

- Determine both the relevant *facts* and *uncertainties* in the situation. What additional information is needed? Flesh out the case by creating different scenarios.
- Think of some *analogous* cases (*casuistical* ethics). What course of action was decided on?
- Identify the ethical *issues* and *points of conflict* in the situation. What *values* are at stake in making the decision?

2. Stakeholders & Obligations

- Identify the affected parties or *stakeholders* in the situation. A stakeholder is an individual, a group, an institution or organization, who is affected by the way the ethical problem is resolved.
- Consider your ethical *obligations* toward the stakeholders (*deontological* or *duty* ethics). Consult different professional codes of ethics¹.

3. Options & Consequences

- Brainstorm possible *options* or courses of action that could be taken. Look for *creative middle way* solutions to the ethical problem.
- Consider possible *consequences* of different courses of action (*teleological* or *consequence* ethics). How will each action affect the stakeholders?

4. Assessment & Action

- As a final *assessment* of your decision, consider the following *reality tests*: Would you be willing to openly state your decision (*Publicity* Test)? Would you be comfortable if all scientists made the same decision under the same circumstances (*Universalizability* Test)? Would you be willing to have this action performed if you were in the stakeholder's place (*Reversibility* Test)?
- Decide on a plan for action!

Tom W Adawi, 2005

¹ For example, here: <http://www.onlineethics.org/Resources/ethcodes/EnglishCodes.aspx>