Ethical Decision-Making

tools for making an ethical decision

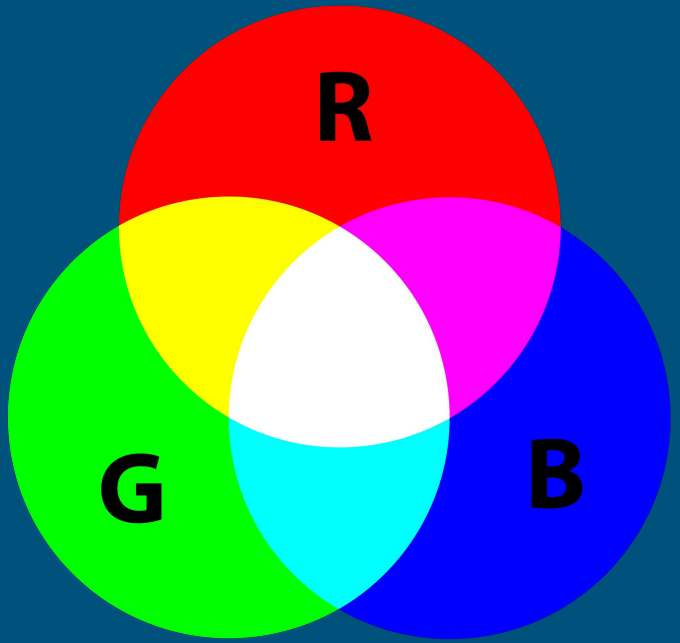
Recognizing an Ethical Issue

- Could this decision or situation be damaging to someone or to some group?
- Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative, or perhaps between two “goods” or between two “bads”?
- Is this issue about more than what is legal or what is most efficient? If so, how?

Get the Facts

- What are the relevant facts of the case?
- What facts are not known?
- Can I learn more about the situation?
- Do I know enough to make a decision?
- What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome?
- Are some concerns more important? Why?
- What are the options for acting?
- Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted?
- Have I identified creative options?

Evaluate Alternative Actions

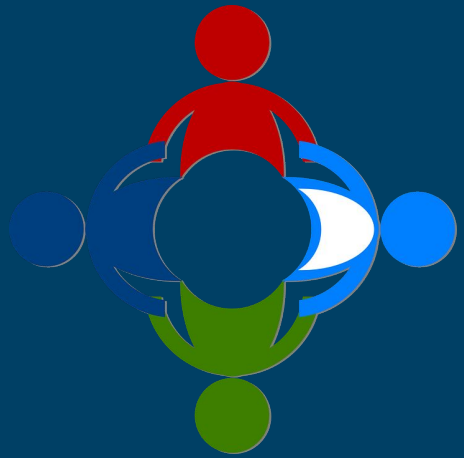


In an Ethical Dilemma, asking different questions can allow one to come to different conclusions.

Utilitarian Approach

Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm?

Rights Approach



Which option respects the rights of all who have a stake?

Justice Approach

Which option treats people equally or proportionately?

Common Good Approach

Which option serves the community as a whole, not just individual members?

Virtue Approach

Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be?

Make a Decision & Test it

- Considering all these approaches, which option best addresses the situation?

- If I told someone I respect—or told a television audience—which option I have chosen, what would they say?

Act and Reflect on the Outcome

- How can my decision be implemented with the greatest care and attention to the concerns of all stakeholders?

- How did my decision turn out and what have I learned from this specific situation?