

Introduction

Most people want to act ethically. Ethics is about morality: it concerns right or wrong, and better or worse. If you are reading this document, you probably care about doing right, and about acting honorably. (If not, then reading further is probably a waste of your time.) This tool is designed to help you apply that commitment to your actions.

Many ethical decisions are easy: we can discern right from wrong, and can select the best available course of action. Other times, though, reasonable people disagree about the right course of action. Theorists over centuries have forged fine tools for making ethical decisions, but because real life can be complicated, even excellent tools have limitations. This ELA Crib Sheet combines a **Concept Model**, drawing from multiple ethical theories, with a basic **Decision Framework**. We intend it to be brief and memorable. We hope that it helps you consider what to do, especially when making ethical decisions as a group, when members' values and perspectives may differ.

Concept Model: *OMAR*

Consider all of the following when choosing between available actions, and when thinking about new options.

Outcomes: What is the probable impact of each option on everyone it would touch? You must consider all persons equally when making outcome-based ethical judgments. Seek the greatest net benefit (or least harm).

Motives: What motivates your choice? Would it be rational to permit everyone in your situation to act as you propose? Do actions demonstrate respect for all persons, or do they exploit others, solely as means to your ends?

Actors: What would a proposed action say about your character, or about the values and principles of your group? How would someone you truly admire act in this situation, and why? In many ways, we *are* what we *do*.

Rights: Might any of the proposed actions violate anyone's rights? Do they violate the terms of an existing agreement? Consider the basis for any rights in question, and the corresponding duties imposed by those rights.

Decision Framework

The following process can reveal the moral dimensions of our choices, helping us select the best available action.

1. **What are our options?** Define each option clearly and carefully.
2. **What is the challenge?** What are the ethical considerations here? What rules, principles, or values are involved? Why do they matter? Clarify terms as necessary: you may already be in agreement.
3. **What do we know?** Would additional data or information clarify the situation? Gather it.
4. **What should we do?** Compare options using the agreed-upon values of your group, along with the OMAR considerations above. Determine which options are acceptable, and which is the best available.

Move freely up and down the framework. Seek new possibilities; don't feel locked into your original options.

To Be Continued...

The ELA approach to ethical decision making rests on a foundation of excellent work by others, from classical and modern thinkers like Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart and Harriett Mill, to contemporary ethicists such as Norman Bowie and Thomas Beauchamp, on whose work this simple decision framework is based. As important, these tools are informed by our experience with leaders in multiple contexts, facing an expanding array of challenges. Our tools will evolve as our work continues. We welcome comments through our Website, below.