

Ethical Decision Making for Command Team Leaders



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Overview

Leaders can often be faced with ethical dilemmas and challenges in the workplace. To combat those challenges, leaders must be aware of strategies and practices that can enhance ethical decision-making” (Perez, 2018). Research suggests that when leaders are ethical, they can impact followers and employees (e.g., Bedi et al., 2016). For example, ethical leaders can guide employees to exhibit moral standards and confront work-place problems (e.g., Peng & Lin, 2017) as well as encourage commitment to the organization (e.g., Brenkert, 2018). Additionally, ethical leaders can encourage followers to accept responsibility and take accountability for their actions (Community Tool Box, n.d.). The Department of Defense strives to produce ethical leaders who engage in decision-making practices that represent the values of the Force.

Ethical Decision-Making Defined

In order to understand ethical decision-making, one must first understand ethics and ethical behavior. For example, ethics covers moral principles, standards, and judgment (e.g., Hoover & Pepper, 2014; Javalgi & Russell, 2015). Ethical behavior is behavior that is morally acceptable to the community in which it occurs (e.g., Jones, 1991). Therefore, ethical decision-making is the “process by which people evaluate or define whether a behavior is ethically correct or incorrect” (Li & Rao, 2017, as cited in Zang et al., 2022, p. 2). An ethical leader is a moral person, a leader who treats people in an open and just way and possesses certain traits such as integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness (Treviño et al., 2000).

Ethical decision-making in a military context often occurs in situations where procedure is interrupted and a clear-cut answer is not readily available (de Graaff et al., 2019). Military training documents on ethical training define the following values as vital to ethical decisions in the Service context: integrity, respect, accountability, selfless service, personal courage, and

stewardship of the taxpayer dollar (Department of Defense Standards of Conduct Office, n.d.).

A letter from the Secretary of Defense in 2021 urged members to remember the core values of the country and the Armed Forces, including honesty, integrity, character, and selflessness.

Additionally, all Service members were encouraged to ask themselves, “Is this the right thing to do...and are we going about it in the right way?” An article in the Army University Press defines the purpose of ethics education as “to provide individuals with the capacity to morally distinguish right from wrong when laws are no longer helpful” (Emonet, 2018, p. 1).

Ethical decision-making can be a difficult concept to define without using its own words (ethics) to do so. However, given the constructs from both academia and the Department of Defense, ethical decision-making should be understood as empowering individuals to make the best choices possible for those around them while acting within the constraints that bind them. The rest of this review will cover the nuances and challenges of ethical decision-making that can make those choices difficult.

Ethical Decision-Making Constructs

Multiple models of ethical decision-making exist within the academic literature, with varying levels of detail around the steps of cognitive processing and the application for practical use in real-life situations. Several models are presented in this section, followed by a recommendation for the most appropriate model to use in military training.

Four Stage Models

Several four-stage models of ethical decision-making have been developed in the past fifty years. The main highlights of each stage theory are outlined in the sections below. These models mostly highlight the cognitive stages involved in making a moral decision, which can

help people better understand why they process decision-making the way they do, but may not necessarily demonstrate a process of how to make the correct decision.

Rest (1986)

Rest (1986) suggests that ethical decision-making takes place in four distinct stages:

- 1) Problem recognition: being able to recognize the situation as one needing a moral decision
- 2) Ethical Judgment: determine the morally correct action(s)
- 3) Ethical Intent: value the morality/ethicity of the decision over other factors, which could include money or influence
- 4) Action based on ethical principles: apply the above three steps to make a proper moral decision

Other researchers have expanded components of Rest's (1986) four-stage model. For example, Hunt and Vitell (1986) suggest that prior experience influences problem recognition and ethical judgment. Additionally, researchers propose that decision-making can be influenced by an individual's social and cultural context (e.g., Haidt, 2001).

Hiekkataipale and Lämsä (2015)

Hiekkataipale and Lämsä (2015) suggest that responses to ethical problems contain at least four elements:

- 1) Recognition of ethical problem: recognize the issue at hand, as well as context of the desired state and the actual state
- 2) Ethical judgment: judgment on which action to achieve desired state is most morally correct

- 3) Moral intent: focus on ethical decision when making decision
- 4) Ethical (or unethical) behavior: behaviors exhibited that are considered ethical, such as consideration of other's interests, effective communication, responsible and professional responses, etc.

Zeni et al. (2016)

Zeni et al. (2016) propose a four-stage model that combines multiple theories of decision-making to illustrate the complexities of decision-making (see *Figure 1*):

- 1) Problem-identification, which is mediated by both subconscious and conscious processes
- 2) Ethical evaluation, which is mediated by context, individual differences, and prior experience
- 3) Ethical importance, which involves weighing the morality of different possible decisions
- 4) Decision outcome, resulting in an action being taken

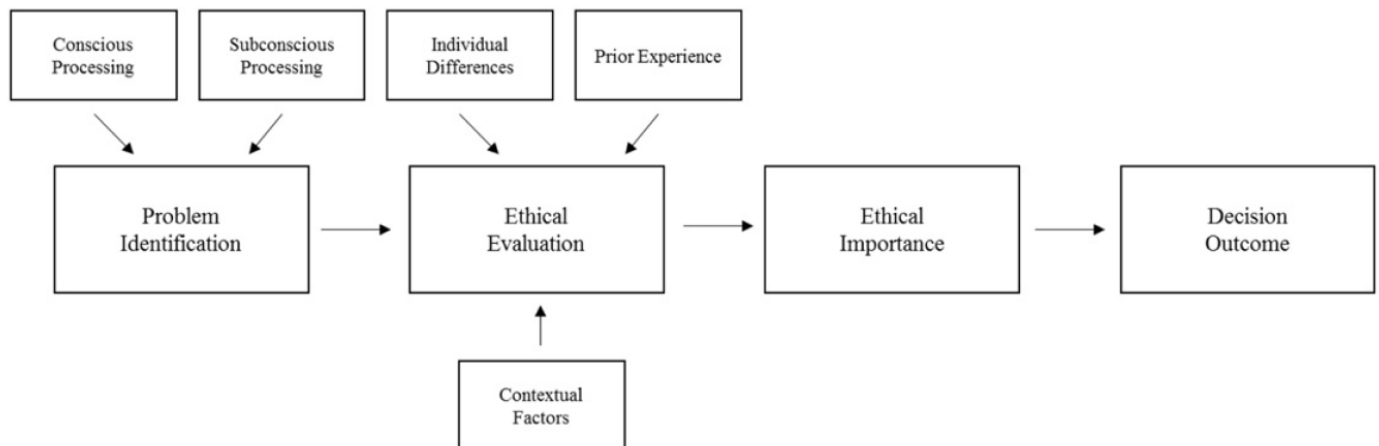


Figure 1. Synthesized ethical decision-making model. Adapted from Zeni, T. A.,

Buckley, M. R., Mumford, M. D., & Griffith, J. A. (2016). Making “sense” of ethical

decision making. *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(6), 838–855.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.09.002>

Bebeau (2002)

Bebeau (2002) used other moral studies to conceptualize a four-component model of factors to take into consideration when assessing ethical decision-making training:

- 1) Ethical sensitivity: “the ability to interpret actions and feelings of others” (p. 283). This includes empathy, role-taking, and cause-effect thinking
- 2) Moral reasoning and judgment: what laws/codes/policies should be taken into account when making a decision?
- 3) Moral motivation: what values should/does someone have when making decisions? This might include profession, personal identity, and socialization
- 4) Ethical implementation: ability to follow through with the decision made

Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022)

Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022) provide a framework for ethical decision-making that involves the following steps:

- 1) Review the conflict
- 2) Investigate the factors of the specific situation
- 3) Evaluate the decision (including any consequences of making the decision)
- 4) Come to a solution

Once the actions take place, a learning process typically follows. *Figure 2* highlights in more detail what specific questions individuals can ask themselves to work through an ethical decision.

Suggested Framework

Each of the aforementioned four-stage models contain the same basic set of processes that humans use when making difficult decisions; although small nuances exist between the models, they are very similar in nature. As such, Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022) is the recommended model to use, due to the ease of understanding of the four steps, as well as the questions provided in *Figure 2*. Such a model could be used to both understand the decision-making process as well as work through future decision-making processes.

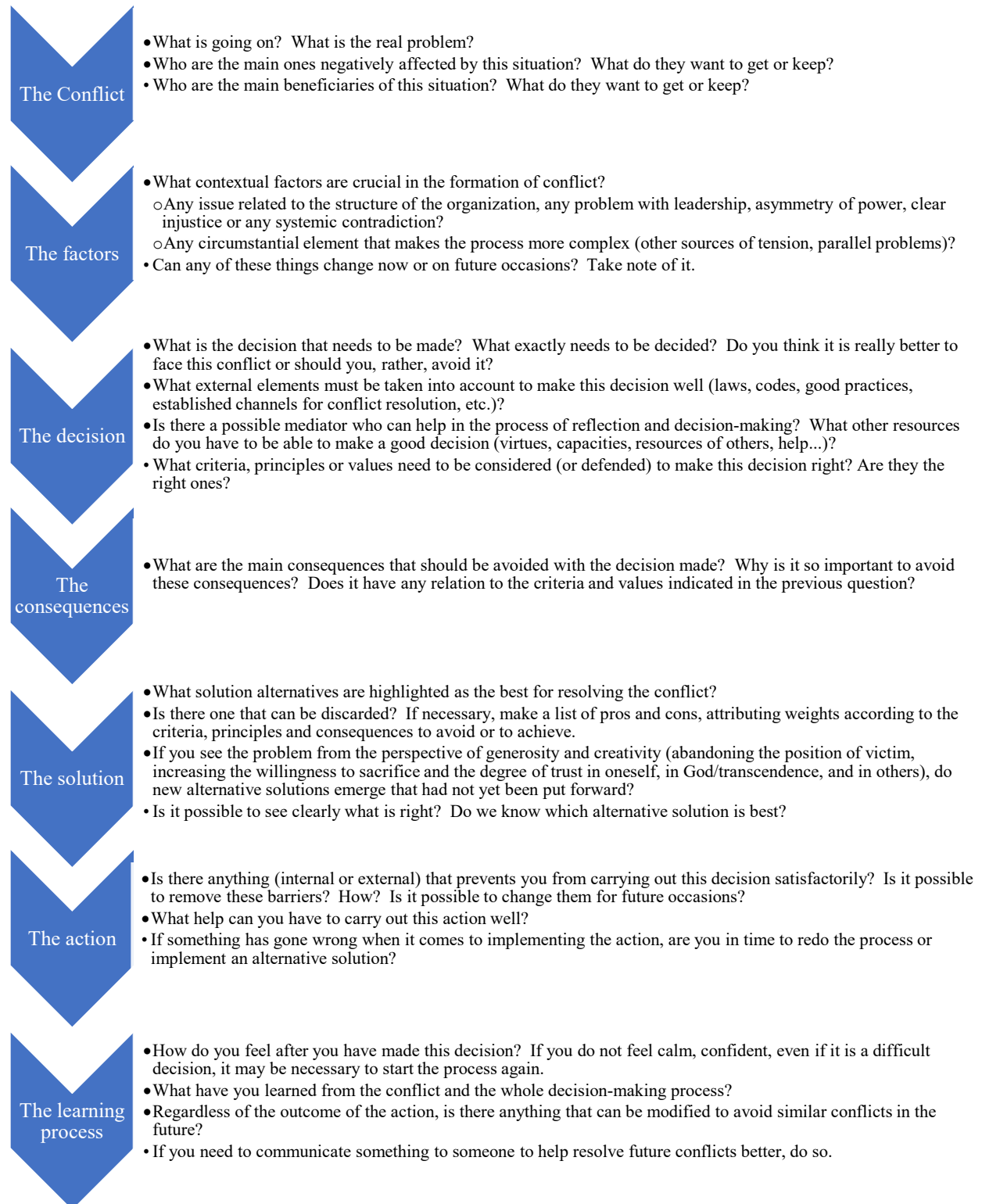


Figure 2. Ethical decision-making process. From Díaz de la Cruz, C., Fernández-

Fernández, J. L., & Ferrero, I. (2022). Ethical Decision-Making: From Practice to

Theory. *Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics*, 13, 207–244.

<https://doi.org/10.34810/rljaev1n13id398702>

Military Ethical Decision-Making

Authority can impact ethical behavior in the military setting (Messervey, 2013). For example, unethical leadership in the military is associated with negative unit performance (Mercado, 2016). Therefore, leaders should demonstrate ethical decision-making behavior (e.g., sound judgment) to ensure trust between followers and leadership (e.g., Halstead, 2022).

Unique Military Considerations

Research suggests there may be a link between unethical behavior and anger as it relates to current and former Service members (e.g., Blanc et al., 2018; Kligyte et al., 2013). Additionally, there may be an association between lack of sleep (i.e., fatigue) and unethical behavior (e.g., Barnes et al., 2011). Since military members may often experience fatigue (Messervey et al., 2021) and anger (Blanc et al., 2018), there is a chance that Service members may exhibit unethical behavior. Additionally, the military setting can trigger visceral reactions in Service members, which can include emotions such as anger and disgust, as well as physical intrusions, such as hunger or thirst (Messervey et al., 2022). These types of conditions mean that decisions in a hypothetical case study setting might look different from those made under duress. Understandably, it is difficult to replicate adverse conditions in training situations. One set of authors proposes three ways to attempt to overcome the challenge of how to train for ethical decision-making (Messervey et al., 2022):

- 1) Perspective-taking: working on developing empathy and a sense for others' experience

- 2) Goal-setting: especially useful pre-deployment, encouraging military members to set goals for how they will interact with others and how they will engage in situations that potentially include ethical dilemmas
- 3) Affect-labeling: encouraging military members to acknowledge emotions they feel before acting, which is especially impactful when dealing with emotions like anger and disgust, as sometimes anger and disgust can trigger and justify unethical behavior

Given the challenges of overcoming visceral reactions, Service members will want to practice interventions to ensure that unethical decision-making behaviors are prevented.

Research shows that engaging in “many years of service in a structured, hierarchical, rules-based organization with a reinforcing professional education system, such as the military, may result in constraining and solidifying of members’ moral development,” meaning that people with many years of service might be more likely to default to existing systems and not be fully open to questioning the ethical ramifications of decisions (Agrawal et al., 2020, p. 324). Another study focused on how military members make ethical decisions and found the same concern: when in high-intensity decision-making situations, Service members tend to draw on their own previous experience to make decisions and engage in less critical thinking (de Graaff et al., 2019). As such, it is important to provide space for senior leaders to reflect on previous experiences and to be open to new perspectives.

Mentorship and Guidance

There is also evidence to show the importance of mentorship and guidance from leaders to those reporting to them. It can be tempting to neglect individuals on the team who already appear to consistently make ethically sound decisions, but providing support and conversations about such situations actually has a net positive effect (Zheng et al., 2015). This type of support

would likely be seen favorably by Service members, as a recent study of Naval physicians found that over 90% of physicians perceived ethics training to be helpful while on deployment and also indicated that a majority (over 55%) would be in favor of more mandatory training or personal mentorship around ethical decision-making (Gaidry & Hoehner, 2016). Finally, members in the Service should be able to bring up ethical concerns without being portrayed in a negative light; leaders high in the ranks can model such behaviors (Zheng et al., 2015).

Military Models of Ethical Decision-Making

Military ethics can help Service members judge and justify military actions from a moral point of view (e.g., Stadler, 2003, as cited in Baumann, 2007). Part of ethical decision-making within the military is taking into account the values and ethics that are expected of military members. One especially complicated facet, of course, is the fact that being involved in warfare can mean the justification of death and killing, which is often accomplished through deindividualization and dehumanization of others (Stanar, 2021). While such tactics might be necessary in times of combat, ethical decision-making training needs to ground members in their common humanity as well.

When considering ethical decision-making in a military context, the values and ethics of the organization itself must be taken into account, as they underpin the ways that members make decisions. The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2009) outline the following core values on their website:

- 1) DoD values: duty, integrity, ethics, honor, courage, and loyalty
- 2) Air Force: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do
- 3) Army: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage
- 4) Coast Guard: honor, respect, and devotion to duty

5) Marine Corps and Navy: honor, courage, and commitment

Such values can only go so far when it comes to determining ethical decision-making. In some cases, there may be a preferred path that the U.S. Military would like leaders to select but when left to make their own decisions, members may not naturally gravitate toward that path. In one study (Blais & Thompson, 2013), civilian participants were asked to engage in ethical decision-making related to military scenarios. Each dilemma required participants to select one of two available options and the civilian responses were almost equally split in both scenarios that were presented (Blais & Thompson, 2013). These results indicate that, if ethical decisions are left to each individual's discretion, decisions will not be uniform. Therefore, the U.S. Military will need to carefully balance the desire for consistency in decision-making across the Force with the desire for innovative and critical thinking that ethical decision-making requires.

The DoD Standards of Conduct Office (Ray, 2022) lists four categories of ethical dilemmas that individuals might encounter: showing courage (standing up to power, intervening, repairing wrongs); getting the job done (sacrificing personal values, using questionable means, skirting the rules, concealing the truth); balancing competing interests (conflict of interest, staying loyal, keeping promises when circumstances change); and judgment calls (suspicion without enough evidence, dealing with unfair advantages, showing mercy). Such dilemmas should be explored in more detail, especially with leaders who will have to make such decisions as part of their regular responsibilities. These types of ethical dilemmas are complex in nature and made more complicated by the fact that law, policy, or direct orders could play a large role in the options available. Several models for decision-making in the military are presented in this section that could be used for guiding ethical decision-making in a military context.

Messervey et al. (2021) suggests that Service members can utilize the Defence Moral Decision-Making Model (DMDM). The DMDM does not directly demonstrate how Service members should solve moral challenges, but rather discusses how factors and morals can influence the decision-making process (Messervey et al., 2021). Additionally, the DMDM is suggested to aid in the development of training and education (Messervey et al., 2021). The model can be found in Appendix B.

Another model, proposed by Agrawal et al. (2020) and built off the four-component model (Bebeau, 2002), urges the U.S. Military to focus on six abilities critical to ethical decision-making:

- 1) Ethical sensitivity: taking into account emotions and responses of others, as well as multiple perspectives
- 2) Ethical reasoning: considering consequences of various courses of actions, thinking critically about outcomes and their impact on stakeholders
- 3) Moral motivation: building personal commitment to knowing what is right and doing what is right
- 4) Moral character: doing what is right even when others do not want that path; should be combined with professional standards and expectations of the industry
- 5) Moral imagination: coming up with creative solutions, a “think outside the box” mentality to envision new solutions
- 6) Ethical culture: building an environment/climate conducive to the other five abilities

Finally, Heyler et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative analysis of the ethical decision-making process of senior military officials in the Air Force and developed the following model shown in *Figure 3* to demonstrate how some senior leaders understand ethical decision-making:

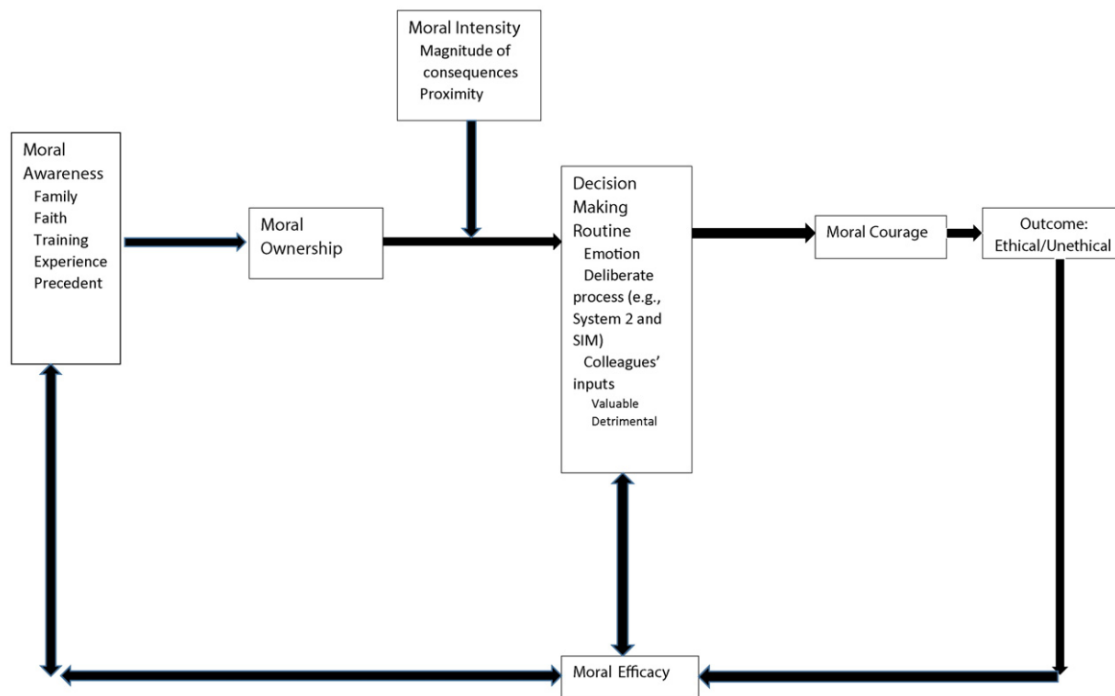


Figure 3. Ethical decision-making process. From Heyler, S. G., Armenakis, A. A., Walker, A. G., & Collier, D. Y. (2016). A qualitative study investigating the ethical decision-making process: A proposed model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(5), 788–801. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.05.003>

The model can be understood as the following:

- **Moral Awareness:** innate sense of right and wrong in situations; begins with upbringing, but expands to include education, training, and personal experience. The decision-making process starts with this foundation
- **Moral Ownership:** one's sense of responsibility for the decision being made – am I the one who needs to make this decision?

- **Moral Intensity:** determines the next step of the process; for relatively inconsequential choices, the decision-making process may be more expedited than for costly decisions
- **Moral Courage:** the nerve required to make the decision one thinks is right
- **Decision-Making Routine:** The decision-making process includes feedback and input from others (time-permitting), but may be adjusted for quicker decision-making, if necessary, which would cut out some of the feedback loop
- **Moral Efficacy:** “the confidence one has in his/her ability to make a moral decision” (p. 797). Impacts most other areas of the process, especially as one reflects on the impact of the decisions made

Heyler et al. (2016) suggest that the model can be used to help leaders explore their own development within the model. It is suggested that moral courage and moral efficacy be developed using case studies, experiential exercises, or mentoring, while readings, lectures or discussions may be appropriate for moral awareness, moral ownership, magnitude of consequences, and the decision-making routine. Heyler et al. (2016) further recommend having participants reflect on the model and how they have seen it play out (or not) in their own decision-making and how they can improve in the future.

Factors Influencing Ethical Decision-Making

Multiple factors can influence an individual's decision-making. For example, situational factors (e.g., context, environment, etc.) and individual factors (e.g., psychological needs, personality, etc.) can impact and influence ethical decision-making (Messervey et al., 2021). Moreover, research suggests that ethical decision-making can be influenced by emotional states (e.g., Kligyte et al., 2013). This can take place at the individual and organizational levels.

Individual Factors

The individual's own prior experience, identity, and personality characteristics can play a role in how they view decision-making and how they make decisions. Here are a few considerations from the academic literature:

- An ethics study with business students found that females were more likely to make decisions that were considered ethical, which largely involved taking a socially responsible approach to business practices (Rodriguez Gomez et al., 2020)
- In that same study, students who displayed more empathy were more likely to make ethically favorable decisions (Rodriguez Gomez et al., 2020)
- A study of social workers found that those who felt they could act authentically (that is, consistent with their own values and ethics) were more likely to make ethically favorable decisions on a number of levels, including respecting others, maintaining fair processes, and creating highest overall benefit possible (Trnka et al., 2020)
- Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022) suggest that there can be both favorable factors and unfavorable factors that can influence an individual's decision-making. For example, favorable factors include attitude, values, principles, and self-confidence, while unfavorable factors consist of lacking moral resources, obsessions or fears, and justifications for actions, such as "everyone does it" or "it's a lesser evil"

Situational-Organizational Factors

The environment can also impact one's ethical decision-making process (e.g., Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2022). For example, favorable environmental factors can include the following:

- Leadership offers support, leads by example, is coherent, inspires trust

- Organizational structure provides codes of conduct, is clear in corporate values, maintains effective control of unethical actions, and provides internal pedagogical communication

Whereas unfavorable environmental factors can include the following:

- Circumstantial factors such as lack of time for tasks, lack of time to make decisions, and overworking
- Leadership does not recognize the work of others, provides minimal instruction, has bad practices, highlights the risk of retaliation, shows a clear lack of trust, and is ambiguous
- Job characteristics such as high moral hazard, tension, high responsibility, expatriation, and very hard work
- Organizational structure reinforces bad practices, unethical culture, competitiveness between departments, and bureaucratic as well as administrative barriers
- Social structure reinforces corruption, market uncertainty, and political instability

Crisostomo-Muña (2022) notes that organizations and individuals can experience dissonance as it relates to ethical decision-making (see *Figure 4*).

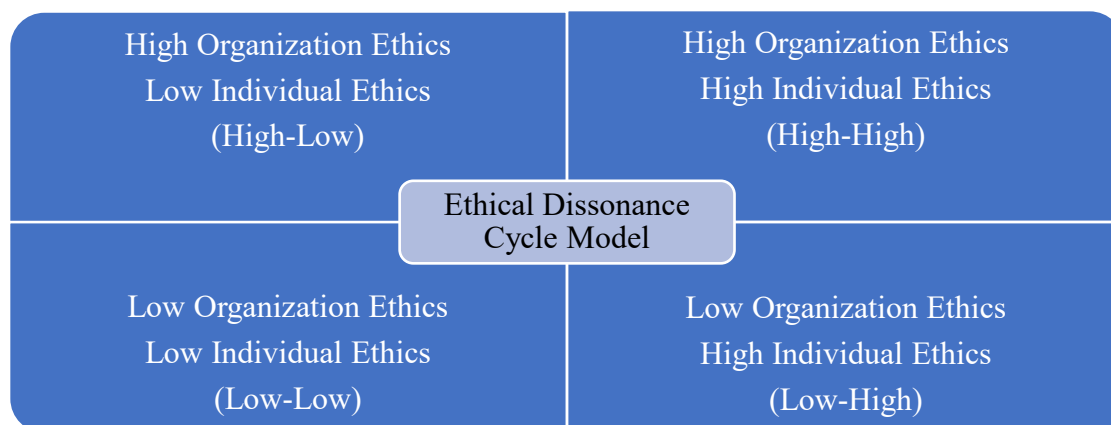


Figure 4. The Ethical Dissonance Cycle Model. From Crisostomo-Muña, D. T. (2022).

How Do You and Your Organization Influence Ethical Decision-making? *Journal of Government Financial Management*, 70(4), 51–53.

More specifically, individuals and organizations can experience disconnect in a varied manner (e.g., high-low, high-high, low-low, and low-high):

- **High-Low:** the organizational ethical values are high, but employee ethical values are low.
 - Dissonance exists and can create further disconnect between organization's mission and goals if employee with low ethical values hired.
- **High-High:** the organizational ethical values are high, and employee ethical values are high.
 - Dissonance is absent, with the organization and employees working well together to meet mission and goals (with continued mentoring and training).
- **Low-Low:** the organizational ethical values are low, and employee ethical values are low.
 - Dissonance is absent, but dissatisfaction for employees and organization is at an all-time high. Change is needed.
- **Low-High:** the organizational ethical values are low, but employee ethical values are high.
 - Dissonance exists and employees may feel they have to compromise their ethical integrity in order to be successful at the organization.

When it comes to situational-organizational factors, it is important to keep in mind that the United States military is “a distinct organizational environment” (Weber & Gerde, 2011, p.

598). For example, bonds and relationships in the military go beyond a regular employment contract, given the commitment and oath of loyalty sworn by military members (Weber & Gerde, 2011). As such, the climate and expectations that make up their environment must be taken into account, as such a climate is likely to be innately different than a typical workplace (Weber & Gerde, 2011); that climate will differ depending on the positions occupied and branch of service.

Impacts of Ethical Decision-Making

Research suggests that leaders occupying higher positions may be better at decision-making (e.g., Brenkert, 2018). Leaders who use more abstract and high-level mental processes are more likely to make sound and ethical actions when compared to leaders who focus on details and specifics (e.g., Zang et al., 2022). However, if leaders only examine and interpret information from their experiences, it can limit their perspective, which may lead to ethical shortcomings (e.g., Zeni et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important for leadership to actively engage in ethical decision-making and examine their understanding of ethical principles and strategies.

Ethical leadership can also be associated with higher levels of ethical behavior in followers and can help shape the ethical culture of an organization (Messervey et al., 2021). For example, employees led by moral leaders were much more likely to show accommodating behavior (Lu, 2014). Moreover, ethical leadership is associated with increased trust and a reduction in turnover (e.g., Eisenbeiss, 2012). When leaders make ethical decisions, they can create credibility and respect for an organization (Community Tool Box, n.d.) as well as foster a desirable command climate, which can lead to a successful organization (Garza, 2014). In summary, leaders who exhibit ethical behaviors and ethical decision-making can positively impact and influence their organization (e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2006; Kaptein, 2015). Further, ethical leaders in the Army were shown to impact the ethical thoughts and behaviors of those

reporting to them (Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Additionally, there was a ripple effect, where the actions of ethical leaders at the top influenced multiple levels of the organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

Consequences Of Unethical Decision-Making

Previous research indicates that stress can negatively impact ethical decision-making. Specifically, individuals may be more likely to cheat when they are fatigued (e.g., Barnes et al., 2011) as well as act selfishly when under pressure (e.g., Shalvi et al., 2012). Other visceral states (e.g., anger, disgust, etc.) can also negatively impact ethical decision-making (e.g., Williams et al., 2016). For example, Kligyte et al. (2013) noted that when individuals experienced anger, their ethical decision-making skills were worse when compared to individuals who experienced fear or no emotional state. Research done on stress within a police environment shows that both stress and fear have an impact on decision-making, with some officers sharing that it is difficult to think clearly in stressful situations (Verhage et al., 2018). Emotions can also impact ethical decision-making. Specifically, Krishnakumar and Evglevskikh, (2016) found that emotions can create confusion when it comes to decision-making, which may lead to negative consequences.

Lack of self-control may also lead to unethical behavior (e.g., Messervey, 2019, as cited in Messervey et al., 2021). For example, research suggests that low self-efficacy can influence an individual to accept ethical delinquency, but high self-efficacy can influence an individual to reject ethical delinquency (e.g., Elias, 2008; MacNab & Worthley, 2008). Therefore, a leader with low-self efficacy would be more likely to accept unethical behaviors and behave unethically themselves; when leaders act unethically, then followers, in turn, may have justification to also act unethically (e.g., Gok et al., 2017). As a result, not only can leadership and followers be

negatively impacted, but the organization as a whole can experience negative consequences (e.g., Crisostomo-Muña, 2022).

Leaders who make unethical decisions can negatively influence an organization. For example, when leaders exhibit bias, there can be an increase in unethical decision-making (e.g., Treviño et al., 2006). Moreover, when leaders fail to make ethical decisions, there can be the consequence of time. For example, Brigadier General Daniel Karbler notes that

If you let that [ethical decision] slide because you don't want to get involved or you're not quick to take initiative, then it's going to take 45 days to resolve. It might take 45 days because a complaint gets filed, possibly an equal opportunity complaint or a congressional and now you're dealing with something for 45 days where leaders are involved, investigating officers, all sorts of things. (Garza, 2014, p. 7)

Other consequences of unethical decision-making could include harm to individuals as well as damage to the company, including people leaving or the company's reputation being compromised (Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2022).

Training And Intervention Strategies

Leaders have two mechanisms for showcasing ethical behavior and strategies: the visible (how the leader is seen working with others and how the leader treats others) and the invisible (how the leader is viewed in terms of character, value, etc.) (Community Tool Box, n.d.). Therefore, it's equally important for leaders to review both intrapersonal practices on ethical decision-making as well as interpersonal practices on ethical decision-making.

Intrapersonal Strategies

Senior leaders can review the types of knowledge that influence their ethical decision-making. According to Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022), ways to increase awareness of one's own knowledge includes reflection on the following aspects of decision-making:

- One's own personal interests and beliefs – how might they be impacting one's feelings and thoughts about the situation?
- Resources available when making an ethical decision – are there available resources that have not been considered yet, such as a handbook or a superior?
- Feelings – avoid acting rashly or lashing out and instead practice acknowledging the feelings and sorting through them
- Context of situation – are there aspects to the situation that are not yet clear? Is there a way to make them clearer?
- Consequences and unintended misunderstandings – have others been considered in the decision-making process? How will the decision impact those involved? How might they interpret such a decision?

Once leaders have an understanding of what can influence their decision-making, they can increase their self-reflection to recognize unethical decision-making practices (e.g., Messervey et al., 2021). One way to increase self-reflection would be for leaders to practice informal self-assessments (e.g., Crisostomo-Muña, 2022), to include questions such as the following:

- Do my own ethical values align with the ethical values of my organization?
- Am I demonstrating (moral, ethical) character?
- Is my organization demonstrating (moral, ethical) character?

Another self-imposed method senior leaders can implement to combat unethical decision making can include behaviors, such as the following (Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2022):

- Acting ethically
- Having self-control
- Distancing oneself from work problems when at home
- Analyzing resources to combat unethical conflicts
- Trusting others

When senior leaders are able to act with intention, it leaves minimal room for “anyone [to] question [their] integrity or ethical behavior” (Garza, 2014, p. 7). In summary, when leaders are aware of their own biases and strategies for decision-making, they may be able to make better ethical decisions (e.g., Díaz de la Cruz et al., 2022; Messick & Bazerman, 1996), which can impact the climate in a positive manner.

The Ethical Leadership Style Questionnaire is an empirically validated instrument to help leaders assess their style when it comes to decision-making and leadership (Chikeleze, 2014; Chikeleze & Baehrend, 2017). A copy of the questionnaire can be found linked in Appendix C. Learning about the styles of leadership can help leaders assess their own leanings and adjust their mindset about decision-making according to situations they might find themselves in (Chikeleze & Baehrend, 2017).

Research shows that, generally speaking, average individuals are not only bad at predicting the outcomes of ethical decisions, but are remiss to even want to do so (Stenmark et al., 2011). Training for ethical decision-making should equip individuals to be prepared to think carefully about the critical consequences, with an emphasis on expanding the number of possible

outcomes as well as considering both positive and negative consequences to decisions (Stenmark et al., 2011). One researcher familiar with military teaching suggests using “ethical triangulation” to think through consequences. It consists of three steps: 1) consider any relevant ethical principles; 2) consider the outcomes/consequences; 3) question the preferred outcomes through the lens of “would a good person do this?” (Baker, 2012). While making those three considerations, the decision-maker should also take into account the practical wisdom of the situation (Baker, 2012).

Interpersonal Strategies

Senior leaders can also practice interpersonal actions in order to combat unethical decision-making. For example, Brigadier General Karbler notes that in order to foster a positive climate with fellow Service members, one needs to “be a good listener” (Garza, 2014, p. 8). Ethical behaviors that senior leaders can model to followers include the following (Messervey et al., 2021):

- Being transparent
- Being open to discussing ethically challenging situations
- Disciplining personnel who violate ethical standards

Further, Díaz de la Cruz et al. (2022) note that individuals can interact with others either as a leader or as a peer, as well as interact with the organization as a whole, in order to combat unethical conflicts (see *Figure 5*).

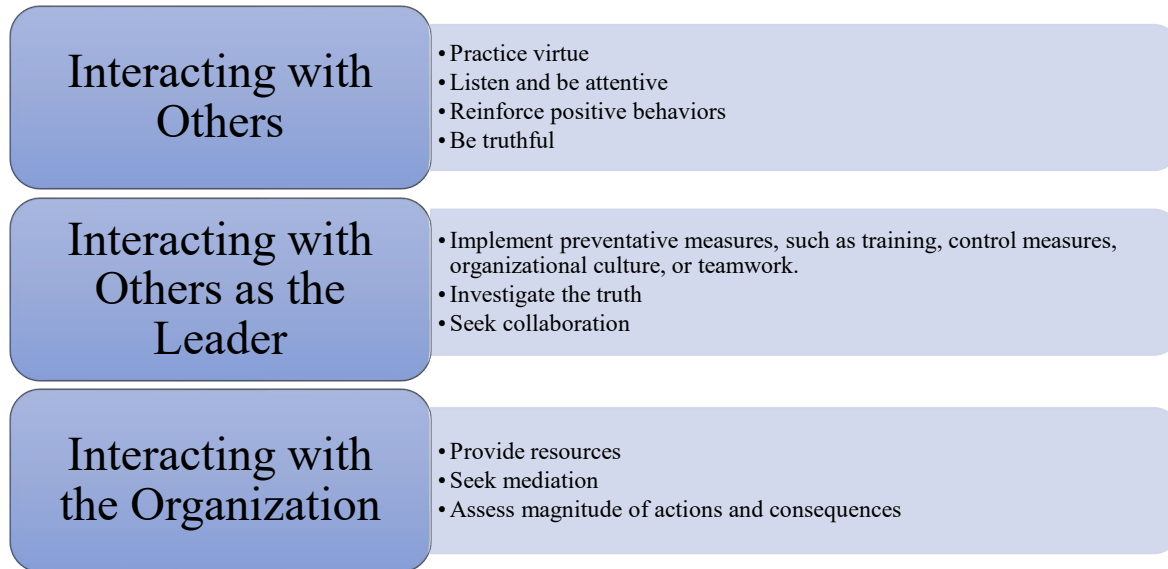


Figure 5. Solutions to unethical conflict. From Díaz de la Cruz, C., Fernández-

Fernández, J. L., & Ferrero, I. (2022). Ethical decision-making: From practice to theory.

Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics, 13, 207–244.

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Additionally, research shows that individuals respond to different situations with a different outlook. For instance, leaders responding to a superior in response to an ethical decision will make worse decisions than they will when responding to a peer or subordinate (Stenmark & Mumford, 2011). This is an important finding for two reasons in the CTAS context: Individual leaders who take part in CTAS likely have multiple subordinates who report to them; as such, they should take this finding seriously when it comes to pressuring subordinates to make decisions on the spot. On the flip side, leaders also should be aware of their own tendencies when interacting with their own leadership.

Best Practices in Industry

A quick Google search of “Ethical Decision-Making Training in Corporate” reveals that the issue of making ethical decisions extends across all fields and that challenges exist in every

environment, even those that are not life and death, as Service members may experience. An article in the *Harvard Business Review* (Soltes, 2017) points out that ethical decision-making trainings in the business world often involve intense discussion over scenarios that almost always result in ethical outcomes; yet, when those same people are placed in decision-making positions later, decisions are made in haste, without time for critical thinking. Soltes (2017) recommends that businesses needed to change their culture and environment to promote better decision-making, especially since it is hard to stand up to others if the company culture is one that is permissive or encouraging of questionable (but perhaps high-profit) behaviors.

An article written by Laura Parks-Leduc (2021) suggests that there are seven best practices for ethics training:

- 1) **Build in discussion:** hearing different perspectives is important to the process, so trainings should include at least some group discussion and should not be solely independent work
- 2) **Make it ongoing:** repeated exposure, such as monthly discussions, can help to keep the topic close to mind, rather than a one-day seminar
- 3) **Use case-based, applied activities:** avoid lectures and instead present life-like situations that allow room for discussion
- 4) **Vary the applications:** provide different scenarios with different contexts and restraints
- 5) **Show that executives care:** leaders at the top must show commitment to ethical decision-making; “tone at the top” matters
- 6) **Provide a framework:** use a simple mantra or saying that is easy to remember; incorporate the values of the organization for maximum impact

- 7) **Prioritize simplicity over philosophy:** focus on application and not philosophical approaches

Further, this research (Parks-Leduc, 2021; Parks-Leduc et al., 2021) suggests eight questions to encourage individuals to reflect on when making ethical decisions (quoted verbatim from the article):

- 1) **Fairness:** How can I act equitably and balance legitimate interests?
- 2) **Outcomes:** What achieves the best short- and long-term outcomes for me and all others?
- 3) **Responsibilities:** What duties and/or obligations apply? What is my responsibility to my boss? My organization? My customers? My colleagues/employees? The environment? Society?
- 4) **Character:** What actions best reflect who I am and the person I want to become?
- 5) **Liberty:** How does respect for freedom, personal autonomy, or consent apply?
- 6) **Empathy:** What would I do if I cared deeply about those involved?
- 7) **Authority:** What do legitimate authorities (e.g., experts, law, my religion/God) expect of me?
- 8) **Rights:** What rights (e.g., innate, legal, social) apply?

Finally, there are a few studies that show the effectiveness of ethics studies in different fields. In the sciences, it was shown that providing cognitive strategies such as considering other perspectives and anticipating consequences were beneficial for instruction in ethics education (Antes et al., 2009). In the business sector, it was also found that cognitive strategies, paired with shorter instruction times and case-based studies, produced the best results (Waples et al., 2009).

Best Practices for Interventions

Case studies are a great learning tool that can be used to teach ethical decision-making content (Bagdasarov et al., 2012; Opsahl et al., 2020). In order to enhance knowledge and retention, two conditions of teaching case studies are recommended: providing a case study and requiring a brief written response, as well as elaborating on an existing case (Bagdasarov et al., 2012). As such, simply providing a case study with reflection and discussion is an effective way to teach ethical decision-making strategies. Research into case studies in health care shows students making learning gains in conceptual learning, group dynamics, and discipline-specific ethical responsibilities (Opsahl et al., 2020).

Given that military members are often under undue stress or in visceral situations, some scholars (Messervey et al., 2022) suggest trying to replicate those conditions in training. Examples include stimulating anger or disgust by showing videos or encouraging reflection on past experiences and then applying that to an ethical decision situation. Tiredness can also be replicated in the time before or after lunch (Messervey et al., 2022).

Training Considerations and Activities

Research suggests that ethical decision-making training can encourage employees' emotional recognition and regulation strategies while enhancing their overall ethical decision-making (e.g., Brock et al., 2008; Mumford et al., 2008). Therefore, leaders can also participate in (or deliver) traditional ethics training or realistic ethics training. Traditional ethics training takes place in the classroom and can increase awareness of ethical challenges and promote strategies (e.g., Harkrider et al., 2013). However, realistic ethics training, or "training as you fight" (Thompson & Jetly, 2014) focuses on real-world situations that utilize stress to complete

said field exercises. In fact, some research suggests that realistic ethics training can greatly improve ethical decision-making (e.g., Paine, 1994).

According to Halstead (2022, p. 7), leaders are responsible for the following:

- Setting and enforcing standards of training, discipline, and conduct
- Developing other leaders
- Building cohesive teams through mutual trust
- Ensuring good order, discipline, and safety
- Demonstrating stewardship of all resources (equipment, money, time)
- Maintaining and upgrading special skills (lifelong learning)
- Protecting lives (American soldiers and citizens, allies, partners, innocent civilians)
- Identifying and, where possible, mitigating risk to the mission and soldiers

Therefore, activities and assignments that are used to develop strategies and make ethical decisions should be reflective and applicable to the individual leader and climate. For example, some assessments for ethical decision-making include the following:

- Scenarios (e.g., Mumford et al., 2006)
- Case studies (e.g., Opsahl et al., 2020)
- Traditional ethics training (e.g., Harkrider et al., 2013)
- Realistic ethics training (e.g., Thompson & Jetly, 2014)
- Decision-making tools (e.g., Kreitler et al., 2014; Mumford et al., 2006)

For example, scenarios have been utilized to assist individuals to better understand ethical decision-making. These scenarios typically include some ethical challenge that is meant to be representative of where the individual works (e.g., Stenmark, 2013). In another example,

Mumford et al. (2006) created four broad scenarios with 12 sub-scenarios that covered a variety of research ethical issues. Each scenario had multiple-choice selections to allow for different responses, which were then scored as unethical, moderately ethical, or highly ethical (Mumford et al., 2006). After completing the scenarios, an overall ethical decision-making score would be calculated to assess the individual's approach to ethical decision-making. Another study included participants reviewing company emails with ethical concerns and then deliberating the responses (Stenmark et al., 2011). The discussion surrounding the response to those emails should emphasize thinking through as many potential consequences or outcomes for each decision as possible (Stenmark et al., 2011).

Case studies should be given adequate time to be processed and discussed. One set of researchers suggest that 2.5 hours be allocated for reading, discussion, recommendations, and debrief (Opsahl et al., 2020). Further, caution should be exercised when using historical cases; too often, they are framed as either an obvious case of the wrong decision or as judging whether the "right" or "wrong" decision was made (Baker, 2012). To avoid such pitfalls, historical cases can be used as the basis for new, fictional scenarios that allow students to fully engage with the material (Baker, 2012). Examples of scenarios or case studies that could be used in training can be found in de Graaff et al. (2019) and Thompson et al. (2018).

One study even suggests incorporating virtual reality or video games into ethical decision-making training, to simulate the pressures that members are under when making such decisions (de Graaff et al., 2019). A recent study of military ethics training in the Netherlands found that participants were most likely to remember ethical dilemmas shared by fellow students; the process of sharing opened up different perspectives that stuck with participants afterwards (van Baarle et al., 2017). As such, in addition to contrived dilemmas, participants

should be encouraged to share their own experiences where appropriate. One possible challenge when facilitating ethical decision-making content to military personnel is ensuring that personnel are aware of the policy and rules that bind them in certain situations. There may be ethical dilemmas that the military has a “right” answer for. Facilitators should be certain that participants are reminded of these obligations in difficult situations even while encouraging participants to engage in critical thinking.

The ACED IT (Assess, Create, Evaluate, Decide, Implement, and Test; e.g., Kreitler et al., 2014) task can be a useful tool for ethical decision making (Stenmark et al., 2021, see Appendix). For example, the ACED IT task has individuals fill in the blanks requesting specific information related to a situation requiring an ethical decision. According to Kreitler et al. (2014), individuals would use the ACED IT tool to “define the issue, generate options, evaluate, select and act” (p. 451) as well as think through various perspectives to generate solutions (see *Figure 5* in Appendix A). Once individuals select a solution, then they would work through the following five steps (Kreitler et al., 2014, p. 451):

1. Describe the solution they chose
2. Detail the steps involved in implementing the solution
3. Identify potential problems that they could encounter while implementing the solution
4. Develop solutions to those problems
5. Predict how the situation would resolve itself following the implementation of the chosen solution (the forecast)

As far as assessment of ethical decision-making programs is concerned, a recent meta-analysis of ethics trainings determined that very few trainings take into account behavioral change or measures (Steele et al., 2016). Given the complexities of ethical decision-making, it

should be considered that assessment includes a practical application component to demonstrate the knowledge gain, but also gives a glimpse into the way that participants will respond in the future.

Conclusion

Ethical decision-making is a necessary, but difficult, process for all industries, including the military. Decisions need to be made that are in line with organizational and societal values. Often, those decisions are complicated by a multitude of factors, which can be overwhelming, causing individuals to simply choose the first route that comes to mind. The ethical decision-making training presented in this document provides a framework to support leaders in making decisions that everyone can feel proud of. Such training allows space for reflection and perspective-taking, which provide more knowledge and power for decision-making in the future. With these new perspectives in mind, leaders of today and the future will feel more empowered in their decisions and more satisfied in the outcomes that follow.

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Appendix A: ACED IT Model Template

PRIOR TO ANY AND ALL USE OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS APPENDIX, PLEASE VERIFY THAT AUTHOR/OWNER PERMISSION IS OBTAINED WHERE NEEDED AND THAT USE OF THE MATERIALS DOES NOT RESULT IN COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT.

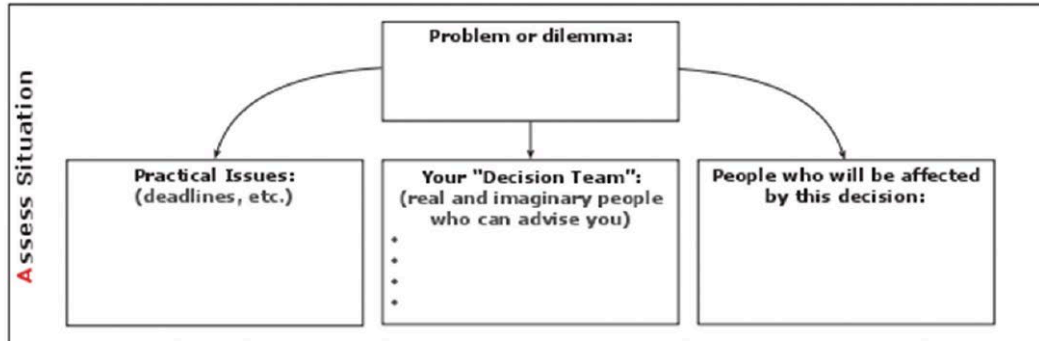
The ACED IT (Assess, Create, Evaluate, Decide, Implement, and Test; e.g., Kreitler et al., 2014) task can be a useful tool for ethical decision making (Stenmark et al., 2021). The ACED IT task has individuals fill in the blanks requesting specific information related to a situation requiring an ethical decision. According to Kreitler et al. (2014), individuals would use the ACED IT tool to “define the issue, generate options, evaluate, select and act” (p. 451) as well as think through various perspectives to generate solutions (see *Figure 6*). Once individuals select a solution, they would work through the following five steps (Kreitler et al., 2014, p. 451):

1. Describe the solution they chose
2. Detail the steps involved in implementing the solution
3. Identify potential problems that they could encounter while implementing the solution
4. Generate solutions to those problems
5. Predict how the situation would resolve itself following the implementation of the chosen solution (the forecast)

The template for the ACED IT model is located on the next two pages.

ACED IT

Assess ♦ Create ♦ Evaluate ♦ Decide ♦ Implement ♦ Test

An Ethical Decision-Making Strategy

Create Choices

Brainstorm with your "Decision Team" ↔ Take a break to let the rest of your brain chime in.

(Briefly describe each choice) →

	CHOICES					
	A:	B:	C:	D:	E:	F:

Evaluate Choices Using Filters

It reflects your values. (Use scale below to rate each statement) →						
It protects the rights of those involved.						
It is fair to those involved.						
It meets relevant ethical and legal standards.						
It sets a good precedent for the future.						
Short-term positives outweigh negatives. (See worksheet before rating)						
Long-term positives outweigh negatives. (See worksheet before rating)						
It is practical. I can pull this off.						
Totals: Any unacceptable?						

NOT AT ALL (0) SOMEWHAT (1) PRETTY MUCH SO (2) VERY MUCH SO (3)

Decide

See if any of your ratings would cause you to eliminate choices.

Check totals, consult your "Decision Team", and DECIDE.

(Over)

(Side 2)

Your Decision:
(Briefly describe and modify if necessary.)

Steps I need to take:	Possible Problems:	Solutions:

Looks OK?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Implement Decision.

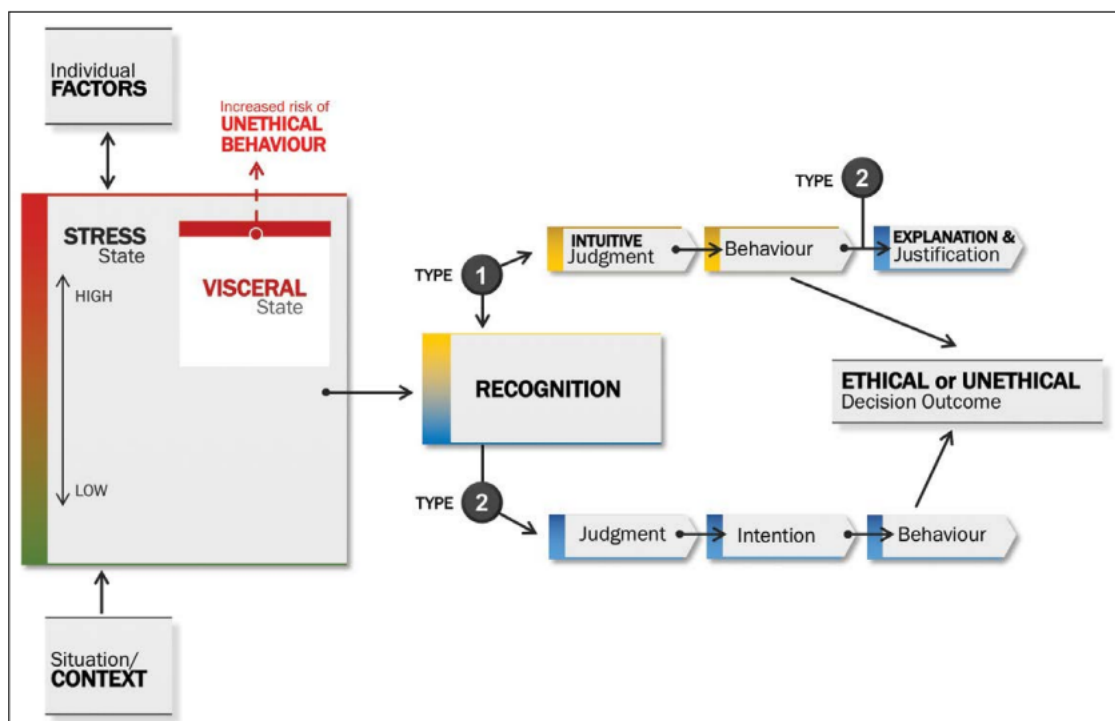
Test
(come back to this later)

How did it work out?

Figure 6. ACED IT task. From Kreitler, C. M., Stenmark, C. K., Rodarte, A., & Pinon, R. D. (2014). ACED-IT: A tool for improved ethical and moral decision-making. *Journal of Moral Education*, 43(4), 447–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2014.943166>

Appendix B: DMDM Model

This model was designed for military personnel and could be used to process decision-making.



Appendix C: Ethical Leadership Style Questionnaire

Leaders can explore their own ethical decision-making style by taking an empirically validated inventory (Chikeleze & Baehrend, 2017). The link to the questionnaire is below. Please note that this inventory discusses various forms of ethics (utilitarian, virtue, etc.) that may not be covered in depth in the course, due to the desire to focus on practical application over philosophical ethics. However, the questionnaire's results could be used in conjunction with a scenario to discuss how and why people are approaching the same situation differently. Example reflection questions are below.

https://content.grantham.edu/academics/GU_LD530/ELS.pdf

1. Think about the scenario at hand and your initial response about how you would approach it. Do you see the relationship between that response and your ethical leadership questionnaire?
2. What other considerations do you want to try to keep in mind when approaching difficult decisions?
3. Who do you know with a different style? Can you ask for their input in the future to gain additional perspectives?

Appendix D: Example Case Studies

Case Study on Academic Integrity

Melisa is in the international commerce and policy program at George Mason University. Her language skills, especially for academic discourse, are still improving. She dedicates a lot of time each week to her major course on Global Political Economy and her English language support course on Graduate Communication in the Disciplines. She feels confident about the

academic environment at Mason and her understating of U.S. academic culture, as she was an exchange student in a language program for one semester at UCLA when she was an undergraduate student.

Her previous experience in the United States is what helped her make a decision about studying for a graduate degree. She was very attracted to the program in international commerce and policy, as her future goal is to be an economics officer for her home government or with an international organization such as the World Bank. Melisa is a very enthusiastic student having never missed a class; she is actively engaged on campus, and even meets with her professors during office hours from time to time.

She has three important projects due the final week of this semester. The projects are (1) a research paper, (2) an academic digital portfolio, and (3) a research poster for an international poster symposium. At midterms she earned a cumulative 3.2 GPA and aims to increase to a 3.5 or above for the final grades. Although she had previously performed well with competing priorities and deadlines, her stress has increased as it gets closer to the end of the semester.

Melisa decided that she will give the most attention to her research paper. However, she also came up with a list of tasks and weekly calendars to complete her other assignments by the deadline. As a way for her to manage stress and time, she asked a student who is a year ahead of her, John, if he would share his digital portfolio with her. She thought this was an effective approach because her professor had provided examples of other student portfolios on Blackboard.

John agrees to help her. He is very busy preparing for final exams, so he gave his sign-in credentials (i.e., username and password) for his Blackboard account to Melisa. He expected

that she would download his portfolio assignment with feedback from the professor and then use it as an example to create her own portfolio. John also thought this would be a way to show Melisa that he liked her. When Melisa was on John's Blackboard account, she did get a copy of his portfolio and feedback, but she noticed that he also had completed the major course on Global Political Economy in the previous semester. Melisa was curious if the final research paper was the same. After looking through his assignments for this course, she figured out that the instructions had not changed and he had earned an A on the paper. Therefore, she went ahead and downloaded a copy of his research paper, too.

She attempted to put his final research paper into her own words. In fact, she re-wrote more than half of it. However, when her professor received the paper, SafeAssign indicated that 30% matched with John's paper. Her professor referred the situation to the Office of Academic Integrity without informing Melisa and John.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

1. *Honor Code:* Explain why the student(s) might have violated standards of academic integrity. Giving specific reference to the Honor Code, which aspects should be considered?
2. *Alternative Solution & Campus Support:*
 - a. How could have the student(s) acted differently to complete the assignment while satisfying the standards of academic integrity? Provide at least one alternative solution for completing the assignment while abiding by the Honor Code.
 - b. What campus resources are available to help students in this situation? Be specific with your recommendations on which resources and types of services.

3. *Honor Committee*: Describe the steps that will likely happen next regarding a referral to the Honor Committee with the Office of Academic Integrity? Considering the purpose of the academic integrity standards and possible sanctions, what do you think the outcome of the case should be?

From Harris-Scott, S. & Lewis, A. (n.d.). Case Study on Academic Integrity. INTO George Mason University. (<https://www.oercommons.org/courseware/lesson/16970/student-old/>). CC BY-NC 4.0.

Military Ethical Decision-Making Scenarios

The following two scenarios were presented to civilians (Blais & Thompson, 2013). In the study, civilians responding to each dilemma were evenly split on which was the most ethical outcome. The scenarios below are the exact scenarios presented in Blais and Thompson (2013, p. 249), but could be adapted for the context and desired outcomes, as needed. Keep in mind whether or not the DoD or Service branch has a particular policy or doctrine that must be followed.

Subordinate Dilemma

Imagine that you are the commander of a unit on peacekeeping duty in a foreign country. There are two factions in this country, and you are trying to keep them from fighting. Your orders are to avoid fighting or siding with either faction. One of your subordinates is somebody who has been a good friend for many years. Recently, he has been getting sympathetic to one of the factions. One day, you find out that he has deployed soldiers into this faction's area for protection. This is directly contrary to your orders and to your mission. He needlessly put

soldiers' lives at risk, in an immediate zone of danger. He probably felt strongly that he was saving civilians' lives, and was hoping that you wouldn't find out about it. In a case like this, military rules say that he should be relieved of command and sent for a court-martial. However, you could reprimand him privately instead.

What do you do?

- a. I reprimand him privately
- b. I relieve him of command and have him court-martialed.

Refugee Dilemma

Imagine that you are the commander of a unit on peacekeeping duty in a foreign country. There are two factions in this country, and you are trying to keep them from fighting. Your orders are to avoid fighting or siding with either faction. One of the factions starts to shell the town you are in. Thousands of bombs fall within 36 hours. Suddenly, hundreds of people from the other faction are outside your camp, trying to get away from the bombing. You contact headquarters for permission to let them in and the response is strict: Don't let them in. The concern is that our country must maintain impartiality to be effective in keeping the peace: letting people into our camp makes it look as if we are supporting their faction. Also, if we let a few in, thousands more will try to get in as well. We don't have enough resources to be able to keep them all safe, well fed, and free from diseases.

What do you do?

- a. I let them in.
- b. I turn them away.

Ethical Decision-Making and Email Communication

In the case of Stenmark et al. (2011), responses were judged to be ethical based on the following criteria: “regard to the welfare of others [including benefitting others when possible, even at a personal expense], attendance to personal responsibilities [avoiding bias and being accountable], and adherence to/knowledge of social obligations [respecting cultural norms and guidelines of social roles]” (p. 27). Their study indicates that critically considering consequences is of the utmost importance for ethical decision-making. For CTAS, fake emails could be created, ideally with relatable questions or similar situations to real-life concerns. The discussion surrounding the response to those emails should emphasize thinking through as many potential consequences or outcomes for each decision as possible (Stenmark et al., 2011). As far as example email templates for scenarios are concerned, such templates should be developed with the types of situations that are of most concern to the DoD in the current climate. They could include things such as extremism, discrimination, or questionable practices.

Research Dilemma

The following scenario is taken word-for-word from the study conducted on ethical decision-making in 2006 (Mumford et al., p. 344). The example centers on a research dilemma in the tech field, but could easily be modified for more of a military setting.

Moss is a researcher in the laboratory of Dr. Abrams, a well-known researcher in the field of economics. Moss is trying to develop a model to predict performance of stocks in the technology sector, but she is having difficulty analyzing and selecting trends to include in the model. She enlists the help of Reynolds, another experienced researcher working on a similar topic. With Reynold’s help, Moss eventually analyzes and identifies some key trends, working

them into a testable model. She also discusses some of her other research ideas with Reynolds. Two weeks later, Moss comes across a grant proposal developed by Reynolds and Abrams. She sees that it includes ideas very similar to those she discussed with Reynolds. She takes the matter to Abrams, who declines to get involved, saying that the two researchers should work it out on their own.

1. Reynolds admits to Abrams that he used slightly modified versions of Moss's ideas. Abrams is upset with this, but Reynolds is a key person on the proposal team and the grant application deadline is soon. What should Abrams do? Choose two of the following:

- a. Fire Reynolds from the lab on the grounds of academic misconduct.
- b. Leave Reynolds as first author on the proposal because he wrote up the ideas.
- c. Remove Reynolds from the proposal team, and offer Moss the position if she allows her ideas to be used.
- d. Ask Moss to join the grant team, placing her as third author on the proposal if she allows her ideas to be used.
- e. Acknowledge Moss in the grant proposal because the ideas were hers originally.
- f. Apologize to Moss and indicate that the proposal must go out as is to meet the deadline.
- g. Remove Moss's ideas from the proposal and try to rework it before the deadline.

2. Moss is upset about Reynolds using her ideas and she decides to do something about it. Given that Moss works very closely with Reynolds and their boss Abrams, evaluate the likely success of the following plans of actions Moss can take. Choose two of the following:

- a. Moss asks Reynolds to give her credit by putting her name on the grant proposal as well.

- b. Moss asks Reynolds about the incident and tape records his reaction to later show Abrams.
- c. Moss searches for annotated notes about her ideas that are dated prior to her conversation with Reynolds.
- d. Moss appeals for a “mock trial” for Reynolds to testify under oath to his superiors that the information was his.
- e. Moss searches for Reynold’s lack of understanding of the concepts he claims were his own by questioning him in front of other students.
- f. Moss attempts to sway other researchers to support her to Abrams.
- g. Moss visits Reynolds’ office in hopes of finding evidence that she contributed to the proposal.
- h. Moss asks Reynolds to write an account of their conversation on the day in question and shows her comparison account to him as evidence that he is using her ideas.

Other Resources for Case Study Examples

- Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. (n.d.). *Culture assessment practice*. Santa Clara University. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/culture-assessment-practice/cases-and-tools/>
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