
HANDOUT 4.1: ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

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Ethical decision making requires being aware of your own and your organization's ethical values and applying them when necessary. It involves being sensitive to the impact of your decisions and being able to evaluate complex, ambiguous and incomplete facts. Three major components of ethical decision making are ethical commitment, ethical consciousness, and ethical competency.

Ethical Commitment (Motivation)

Demonstrating a strong desire to act ethically and to do the right thing, especially when ethics imposes financial, social or psychological costs. A crisis or emergency confronts us with many situations that test ethical commitment. Hence, you need to be very clear about your own ethical values and have a strong understanding of ethical standards of conduct.

Ethical Consciousness (Awareness)

Seeing and understanding the ethical implications of our behavior and applying our ethical values to our daily lives. Understanding that people's perceptions are their reality—what we understand to be perfectly legal conduct may be perceived by taxpayers as improper or inappropriate.

Ethical Competency (Skill)

Being competent in ethical decision making skills which include:

- *Evaluation.* The ability to collect and evaluate relevant facts. Knowing when to stop collecting facts and to make prudent decisions based on incomplete and ambiguous facts.
- *Creativity.* The capacity to develop resourceful means of accomplishing goals in ways that avoid or minimize ethical problems.
- *Prediction.* The ability to foresee the potential consequences of conduct and assess the likelihood or risk that persons will be helped or harmed by an act.

The Stakeholder Concept

Ethical individuals understand that each person, group, or individual who is affected by their decisions is a stakeholder who has a moral claim on them. They consider the potential impact of their decisions on others when making decisions. And, they take steps to avoid unjustified harm.
