

6

The Process of Ethical Decision Making

In the previous chapter, we discussed many variables or moderators that may, to a greater or lesser extent, influence the manner in which we make ethical or unethical decisions. In this chapter we will look at a process of ethical decision making that will provide the reader with a more comprehensive analysis and plan of ethics-in-action.

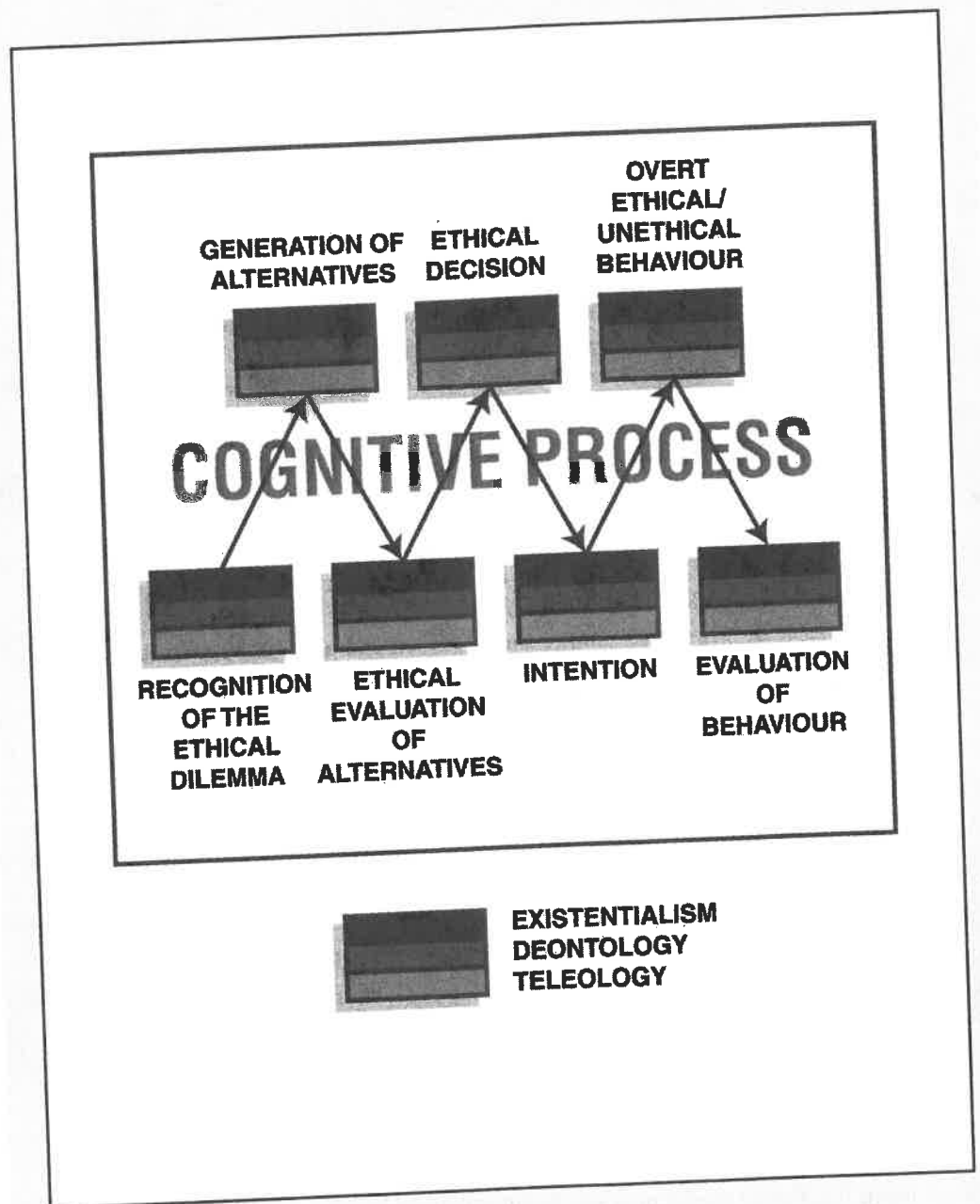
The use of any particular decision-making model will not always guarantee the best decision. The result depends on the decision-maker's ethical beliefs, cognitive abilities, intentions, and creativity. Having said this, we present the following as a framework for the analysis and development of a logical, consistent, and comprehensive ethical decision.

The process consists of seven stages (Figure 6.1). Within each stage, the reader is urged to consider the analysis from three separate ethical perspectives—teleology (good), deontology (right), and existentialism (authentic). By using this unique three-way ethical analysis, the reader assesses a particular dilemma in a more comprehensive way than by using only one theory or process or employing no conscious ethical stance at all (as is the typical manner in which most case studies are analyzed). The result is a better and conscious ethical decision that is good, right, and authentic.

The Seven Stages

1. Recognition of the ethical dilemma or cause. The first stage of the process is the actual acknowledgment that there is, in fact, a dilemma, and that it is ethically laden. If an individual perceives that an issue is in need of resolution, yet does not see its ethical nature, an attempt to solve the problem will go on without the insight of a conscious and comprehensive investigation of ethics. The problem is then solved with the decision-maker using an unconscious ethical bias. For example, as explained earlier, one may use, without examination, a teleological perspective to solve the dilemma. As a result, all the pitfalls of using this theory exclusively will befall the decision-maker (i.e., ends justifying means) and a relatively narrow resolution will be the outcome. Therefore, the initial stage in the process is an all-important one in order

Figure 6.1: A Process for Ethical Decision Making



for the remaining six stages to contribute meaning to a good, right, and authentic ethical decision.

The *teleological recognition* will focus upon the degree to which the best ends are achieved for the group (utilitarianism) or the individual (hedonism). The decision-maker must assess the extent to which the dilemma presents barriers to the accomplishment of group or individual goals. The following questions may help the decision-maker in determining the teleological basis of the dilemma.

1. Does the dilemma prevent ends from being achieved for the individual?
2. Does the dilemma prevent ends from being achieved for the group?

These very simple questions provide the basis of teleological recognition.

The *deontological recognition* will focus upon the rules that have or have not been followed and the duty, implicit or explicit, which has or has not been assumed. The decision-maker may wish to ask the following questions to decide whether rules or duty are at issue.

1. a) Has a rule, a policy, a procedure, or a code of ethics been broken?
b) Is it a bad rule, policy, procedure, or a code that ought to be broken?
2. a) Has a law been broken?
b) Is it a bad law that ought to be changed?
3. What was the implicit and explicit duty of individuals in the case?
4. Was this sense of duty followed?

The issues these questions raise will provide the decision-maker with some needed information to determine the deontological aspect of dilemma recognition.

The *existential recognition* will focus upon the extent to which the dilemma has created a situation in which some aspect of the individual's authenticity is being restricted or denied. The decision-maker may wish to ask the following questions to determine whether authenticity is at issue.

1. Is there a restriction upon the individual's freedom to choose?
2. Is there a restriction upon the individual's freedom to take responsibility for action?

3. Is there an attempt in general to control an individual's or a group's behavior?
4. Is there an attempt to deny an individual's free will?

If any one of these questions can be answered positively then the dilemma has been recognized as having an existential feature. Eventually the decision-maker must address this feature through the choice of resolutions.

Through the perspectives of each ethical theory, the reader can discover a wide range of possible problems. Once each of these perspectives has been examined, the reader must then decide what, in fact, is the actual problem or cause. It may be that the problem is complex; a mosaic of sub-problems. However, the reader must detect which problem is the cause of the others. So often students analyzing cases make the error of identifying the first problem they discover and assume that it is, in fact, the issue to be addressed. Without careful consideration, students may choose a symptom of the primary cause rather than addressing the actual nub of the ethical dilemma. As a result, the analysis proceeds, the symptom is resolved, yet the primary issue remains unresolved. Therefore it is important that the reader is convinced that the problem identified is in fact the cause of all symptoms and not a symptom of a greater cause (cf., Malloy & Lang, 1993).

2. Generation of alternatives. The second stage of the process is the generation of alternative solutions based upon the tenets of each of the three ethical perspectives. The rationale, to reiterate, is to be ethically comprehensive at each stage of the process to provide good, right, and authentic solutions. The decision-maker must, therefore, develop plausible alternatives for the resolution of the dilemma from teleological, deontological, and existential positions.

The teleological position will be geared towards achieving group or individual ends. The deontological position will focus upon rules, policies, and duty. The existential position will contribute alternatives that involve free will and choice, responsibility and authenticity. The intent of this stage is not necessarily to be locked into a particular school of thought. It is quite probable and desirable that alternatives be composed of two or all three ethical positions, that is, alternatives that can resolve the dilemma in a good, right, and authentic manner. The reader may wish to generate alternatives from each position separately before attempting an amalgamation of two or more positions. Being locked into one ethical orientation may result in a constricted, rather than a comprehensive and rich, ethical analysis. This phase requires a great

deal of effort and creativity from the reader, for it is from this stage that the eventual resolution to the dilemma arises. As Hodgkinson (1983) states, sometimes "he who does not hesitate [and reflect/examine] is lost" (p.104).

3. Evaluation of alternatives. The third stage of the process is the evaluation of alternatives. Each alternative is assessed, based upon the criteria of the three ethical theories. The decision-maker has to decide to what extent each alternative is good, right, and authentic. That is, does it accomplish the best end; does it follow or create a rule, a policy, a procedure, or a law? Does it allow the individual to be free to choose and to be responsible for all action? The alternative that best satisfies these criteria in the most comprehensive manner is presumably the ideal alternative to select.

4. Selection of the ideal solution. To restate, the ideal solution is the option that is the most comprehensively good, right, and authentic. The identification of the ideal or comprehensive alternative does not necessarily result in the use of the ideal solution. In any organizational setting, there will be many pressures and surprises that come up unexpectedly; the world of human interaction is often in a state of subtle or blatant chaos. These moderators, which upset the ideal or theoretical process, may influence the intent of the decision-maker to start the ideal solution.

5. Intention. One's intent, according to Aristotle and Kant, is perhaps the strongest determinant of ethical action. If your intention is to carry out an ideal resolution, then presumably and conceptually you will. Unless unforeseen circumstances that are beyond your control prevent you from doing so, the ideal decision will become the actual decision. If, however, your intention is not to carry out the ideal solution because of a variety of moderators (e.g., peer pressure, moral intensity, organizational climate, and culture or societal pressure), then the actual decision will differ from the ideal. For example, suppose that you have worked through the decision process and determine that the good, right, and authentic decision for a sport/leisure fundraising program is to prohibit funding from tobacco or alcohol sponsors. However, by doing so you will undoubtedly be the focus of the wrath of various powerful board members who demand a successful fundraising campaign whatever the ethics involved. Not only could you lose your job, but the organization will suffer, and some valuable traditional sources of revenue will be lost. As you have no immediate job opportunities at hand and your young family is dependent upon you, you choose not to carry out the ideal solution and opt instead for a weaker or watered-down resolution.

Figure 6.2: Summary of Case Study Analysis

THE MODERATORS

Individual: ethical orientation; level of moral development; demographic variables.

Issue-Specific: normative consensus; physical and psychological distance; magnitude of consequence; probability of effect; concentration of effect; immediacy, strategic/tactical orientation.

Significant Other: personal; interorganizational; extraorganizational.

Situational: organizational ideology; organizational culture and climate.

External: political; economic; technical; societal.

THE PROCESS

1. Identify the problem from each perspective.
2. Develop alternatives from each perspective.
3. Evaluate each alternative from each perspective.
4. Select the ideal solution.
5. Determine intention to act upon the ideal solution.
6. Actual decision.
7. Evaluation of the actual decision from each perspective.

6. The actual decision. The actual decision is, one would hope, the most comprehensively ethical decision. That is, it is good, right, and authentic. The actual decision is a function or product of the individual's discovery of the ideal decision, the moderating variables that will allow its implementation, and the individual intent to carry through with the ethical choice. The decision may or may not satisfy all criteria. However, this process has provided the decision-maker with the logic to consider a variety of perspectives that have ultimately resulted in a comprehensive and informed or conscious resolution.

7. Evaluation of the actual decision. As we have stated throughout this text, the decision-maker should seek to make good, right, and authentic decisions. At this point in the analysis, you must decide the extent to which the actual decision has met the comprehensive ethical criteria. Does it accomplish desired ends? Does it follow existing rules or have new ones been made? Does it allow for individual free will and the accompanying responsibility? If the actual decision does not meet each of the three criteria, can the decision-maker justify this less than comprehensive resolution? For example, perhaps a decision was made that was right and authentic, yet was not good. In other words, the decision fol-

lowed the rules, was true to the decision-maker's heart, but did not accomplish the intended goals. Can such a decision be defended?

To conclude, we urge the reader to seek comprehensive ethical solutions that are good, right, and authentic. We also caution that such a comprehensive resolution may be difficult, if possible or desirable, to achieve. Figure 6.2 provides a summary of the moderators and process of this second model. While we believe that each of these stages of ethical analysis are extremely important, the reader is well advised to make use of those moderators which are pertinent to the dilemma or case study at hand. An example of the application of this second model is provided in Chapter 9.

References

- Hodgkinson, C. (1983) *The Philosophy of Leadership*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Malloy, D.C., & Lang, D.L. (1993). An Aristotelian approach to case study analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 12:11-16.