

Framework for Accountable Ethical Decision-Making

Is this a clinical or corporate issue?

Clinical

Corporate

Stage 1: PROBLEM

Questions: What is the problem? Who is responsible for taking the action required to implement the solution?
Objectives: Clarify the question. Narrow question down to manageable proportions.
Issues to consider: Beware of questions that are too vague, too fuzzy or beyond your scope of control. Ensure you have the authority to solve the problem and implement your solution.

PROCESS

Does our process reflect the principles of accountability for reasonableness?
 i. Accountability, reasonableness
 ii. Inclusiveness
 iii. Publicity, openness and transparency
 iv. Revision and appeal
 v. Enforcement

Stage 2: ISSUES

Questions: What are the ethical issues at play in this problem? What hospital/professional policies or goals are relevant to the problem? What are the relevant legal considerations? What professional standards are relevant to the decision?
Objectives: Formulate context: What is the ethical issue?
Issues to consider: Get all of the relevant ideas onto the table regardless of whether they seem right or wrong.

DIRECTION

Is the proposal consistent with:
 i) Our Strategic Plan? ii) Our goals?
 iii) Our Mission, Vision and Principles?
 iv) Our current policy?

Stage 3: STAKEHOLDERS

Questions: Who are the relevant stakeholders/stakeholder groups? What are their interests? Are there conflicting interests between stakeholder groups? Are or should stakeholders be represented in the decision making process? What would the stakeholders say that are not at the table?
Objectives: Identify stakeholders. Assess stakeholder interests. Assess need for stakeholder consultation. Identify conflicts.
Issues to consider: Sometimes ethical conflicts are conflicts between the legitimate interests of different groups. We need to identify those interests and assess their legitimacy. We are accountable to our stakeholders

Stage 5: DECISION

State the favoured outcome from Stage 4. Explain reasons for preferring chosen outcome over the alternatives.
Objectives: Clearly identify decision. Clearly articulate reasons for choice.
Issues to consider: This stage represents your public accountability. Apply the TV test. Would you be comfortable going on the 6 o'clock news and publicly stating and explaining your decision?

Stage 4: OPTIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

Questions: What are the possible courses of action? How do they rank? What are the positive and negative consequences of each of the options? Why should we follow one course of action over another? Why is this value most important in this case? Do we have previous obligations we are bound to honour?
Objectives: Identify alternatives. Evaluate. Form judgment. Make decision.
Issues to consider: It is always possible that some pressing moral value will outweigh normal considerations. These values could arise from a number of sources and would include, but need not be limited to: maximizing the good, autonomy, justice (fairness), caring (compassion), stewardship and privacy.

Stage 6: IMPLEMENTATION

Questions: What steps are required to put the choice into action? Who is required to perform the relevant actions? What evaluation mechanism for follow up is required? What educational or informational strategies are required?
Objectives: Turn decisions into action. Provide evaluation mechanism. Inform and educate.
Issues to consider: The best decisions are useless unless implemented. Part of our accountability is the ability to review decisions to check outcomes. Criticism of values-based strategies is often ill- or misinformed. An explicit information or education strategy to get your decision, justification and reasons out can forestall a great deal of clean-up later.