

Ethical Dilemma Case Studies

Step #1: Select one of the following case studies.

- [Cross-Cultural Medicine](#)
- [Data Manipulation](#)
- [A Conflict of Authorship](#)
- [Scarce Resources](#)
- [Fixing Food Insecurity, But at What Cost?](#)

Step #2: Use the RIGHT Decision Method to decide on the ethical decision you would make based on the scenario. This method is used by Direct Support Professionals, but the questions have been adapted for more broad usage.

R: Recognize the ethical dilemma.

- What is the issue at hand? How is the Code of Ethics applicable to the scenario? This may vary depending on the situation. (Ex: Hippocratic oath, mandated reporting, etc.)

I: Identify points of view.

- Who are the people involved or impacted by the situation? What do they need?

G: Gather resources and assistance.

- If there are any, what are the agency policies that need to be considered? What laws or regulations in the state may influence your decision-making? Is this a situation where legal expertise is required?
- What are some community resources that might help resolve the problem or aid in your decision-making?

H: Have a plan.

- Who do you need to speak to first? What will need to be said? What cannot be shared? What preparations will you need to make?
- What are steps that you can take to ensure the best possible outcome for your scenario? How could people react and how do you plan on responding?

T: Take action based on ethical standards.

This step is where you will implement the plan you devised, so it is not as applicable for the case studies itself. However, in real-life applications it is important to monitor the success of the planning process to reflect on your decision.

- What went well? Why?
- What didn't go well? Why?
- After evaluating your outcome, what would you do differently?

Step #3: There is no answer bank to these case studies. In real-life ethical dilemmas, there isn't always a right answer. You will need to select the best decision within the complex parameters you are working that fits your goal, code of ethics and personal values.



Cross-Cultural Medicine

You are a general practitioner. A mother comes into your office with her child who is complaining of flu-like symptoms. Upon entering the room, you ask the boy to remove his shirt for the examination and you notice a pattern of very distinct bruises on the boy's back. You ask the mother where the bruises came from, and she tells you that they are from a procedure she performed on him known as "cao gio" or "coining". When translated to English, it means "to scrape the wind" because "catching a cold" in Vietnamese culture is referred to as "catching the wind." The procedure involves rubbing warm oils onto the skin with a coin or other flat metal objects and is used in many Asian cultures. The mother explains that it is used to raise out bad blood and improve circulation and healing. When you touch the boy's back with your stethoscope, he winces in pain from the bruises. You debate whether you should call Child Protective Services and report the mother.

Data Manipulation

Labs A & B had been collaborating for some time, leading to a publication in a prestigious journal. A researcher from Lab A had recently visited Lab B to learn a technique that was used in the paper. While there, they noticed some suspicious discrepancies in the technique that the technicians and researchers used. When following up with questions about the technique, they received very vague explanations without ever being shown how to do the experiment they visited the lab to learn. Upon their return, they reported this to the PI of Lab A, who then decided to test the technique by sending pure water to Lab B instead of the expected next batch of dissolved proteins. Lab B was still able to generate data from the water, which was impossible and led to PI of Lab A calling the PI of Lab B. However, the PI of Lab B denied any wrongdoing and dissolved their partnership.

A Conflict of Authorship

You work in a productive, cohesive lab that employs many intelligent and hard-working investigators who were trained in foreign countries. These personnel created the experimental designs of their projects, collected the data, and interpreted it for results. However, some of these individuals struggled with English writing skills and were able to get the PI to write their papers entirely while still maintaining their spot as the first, second, etc., authors and the PI listed as the last. The PI is comfortable with this arrangement, but conflict arose when a post-doc was asked to assist with these investigators' papers. They argue that they hadn't directly participated in the research and shouldn't be writing their papers; additionally, they express that even if they had participated, it wouldn't be fair to put in the large time commitment without receiving first authorship. Both sides came to a truce to have the post-doc involved in the research from the beginning if they were willing to do the writing while the investigators collected most of the data. Despite still objecting to the investigators being listed as the first authors without writing the publication, the post-doc compromised to maintain peace and productivity in the lab.

Scarce Resources

You are a doctor in a hospital's emergency room where six accident victims are brought in at the same time. All six victims are in danger of dying, but one patient is significantly worse off than the others. You and your team have a very slim chance of saving that individual even if you devote all your resources to them while letting the others die. Alternatively, you and your team would be able to save the other five patients if you are willing to divert your resources and efforts to them instead at the expense of the patient who is most seriously injured.

Fixing Food Insecurity, But at What Cost?

The issue of food insecurity is created and sustained by a variety of issues but is primarily influenced by our modern-day food and farming systems. The current farming and food production systems are highly unsustainable due to arising problems like its contribution to a third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and its direct responsibility for 60% of global biodiversity loss. Additionally, the modern food systems are highly inequitable due to the power and wealth being held in the hands of a few corporations. Due to these two major factors, food insecurity has been rising despite technological advances leading to increased yields.

Recent research has shown that while the food systems of Indigenous Peoples has been stereotyped as "unproductive" in modern society, these food systems are highly efficient, sustainable, and equitable. While Indigenous representatives from all over the world have stressed the benefits of utilizing these ancestral food systems, they have also raised concerns on how this shift could cause barriers for the Indigenous Peoples to access their own ancestral systems. Indigenous Peoples are largely left out of policy discussions and their rights to natural resources and lands are historically undermined, so there are concerns of how this could be a threat to the Indigenous food systems.