

Organizing our thoughts through “D.I.S.O.R.D.E.R.”

- Dilemma – *define it.*
- Information – *acquire it.*
- Stakeholders – *identify them.*
- Options – *explore them.*
- Rights/Rules/Results – *consider them.*
- Decision – *make one.*
- Effects – *evaluate them.*
- Review & Reconsider

Using the DISORDER Ethical Problem-Solving Framework

The D.I.S.O.R.D.E.R. slide provides a mnemonic device to help you think through ethical dilemmas, which are typically complex and ambiguous, in a structured way. Below is further explanation of the D.I.S.O.R.D.E.R. acronym:

1. Define the dilemma.

Often times this is the most challenging step. What is the ethical problem that you are facing? What conflicts make the situation difficult to deal with?

2. Acquire any necessary information.

Second, we have to conduct empirical inquiries as appropriate, discover the facts, and get as much information as we can. What questions do you need to ask in order to acquire more information? What sources do you need to go to in order to obtain this information?

3. Identify the stakeholders.

Who is (or might be) affected by this dilemma or the decisions you make regarding this problem? Part of the work of sorting out the stakeholders is to make sure that all whose interests are really affected are taken into account. Another part of the work is to see that non-stakeholders who seek to attach themselves to a decision are excluded from influencing the decision.

4. Explore the options and the reasons to select one over another.

What alternatives are really open to you, and what are the probable outcomes of each? What, in this situation, is it possible, and reasonable, for you to do? And what will be the likely results of each of those choices? Which of the outcomes on the list are totally unacceptable? They should be eliminated, and the rest left for further consideration at a later stage. The emphasis here should be on identifying the reasons why one option is better (more ethically justifiable) than another.

5. What are the rules and rights involved in this dilemma?

Review the rights of the various participants, as legally protected rights, in our system, trump, or override, considerations of right outcome. We must also respect moral (usually legally enforced) rules that are held to be valid regardless of the consequences.

6. Make a decision.

Although ethical dilemmas are challenging, it is important not to get trapped in an endless loop of discussion. At some point, a decision must be made. Remember that your point of view will be most defensible if you've considered possible alternatives and can explain why they are less acceptable.

7. Evaluate the effects of the decision

You need to follow up, to find out what results your decision has had.

8. Review the situation and reconsider the decision

The trouble with ethical dilemmas, as opposed to ethics as a discipline, is that the real solution is empirical, day to day, trial and error. So, finally, you have to review the situation and reconsider the decision, with an eye toward revision. Nothing, in human affairs, is ever set in stone. We make our decisions, usually, for today, knowing that the decision will probably produce a new situation, with its own new dilemmas, and we will have to take on the whole problem again.