

Dilemma Deck: For Discussion of Ethical Choices

Overview

The Dilemma Deck ([Instructions](#)) was produced by the *Committee for the Advancement of Professional Ethics (CAPE)* as part of its mission to develop and share resources targeted to I-O education in ethical research and practice. It is intended for undergraduate and graduate students as well as post-graduates who take ethics training to professional development interests or requirements. It will be most beneficial for participants who are familiar with the APA Ethics Code.

The Dilemma Deck: The Deck consists of “cards” with 75 - 100-word scenarios that describe ethical issues faced in both academe and practice. They are designed to be used as “flashcards” to stimulate informed discussion around ethical challenges. They include issues associated with, among other things:

- Informed Consent
- Confidentiality
- Boundaries of Competence
- Institutional Review Boards
- Definition of the Client

Ethical Paradigms

In addition to dealing with common ethical issues, each of the dilemmas was written to reflect one of five paradigms associated with ethical challenges in I-O (Lefkowitz, 2017).

Paradigm I. “Prevent Harm: Awareness or anticipation of someone else’s being harmed or wronged by a third party.”

Paradigm II. “Temptation: Contemplating an action in accord with some self-serving motive, goal or ambition that would be unjust, deceitful or harmful to another.”

Paradigm III. “Role conflict: Facing competing obligations or responsibilities (sometimes to two or more persons) such that fulfilling one means failing to meet the other.”

Paradigm IV. “Values Conflict: Feeling important but conflicting personal values so that expressing one entails denying the other(s) expression.”

Paradigm V. “Coercion: Being pressured to violate ethical standards.”

A Model of Ethical Challenges

This package includes scenarios for instructional use developed by combining each of five common types of ethical dilemmas noted above (e.g., confidentiality) with the five ethical paradigms to generate a broad array of ethical challenges that may be faced by I-O psychologists. We believe that this approach to I-O ethics training will help participants (1) think on their feet to provide a meaningful response to an ethical dilemma; (2) present a potential solution that is informed and confident; and (3) gain feedback on their response through discussion with a facilitator and/or a small group of peers.

[1] Lefkowitz, L (2017). *Ethics and values in industrial-organizational psychology* (2nd edition). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. Paradigms are directly quoted with the permission of Joel Lefkowitz

Administration

The Dilemma Deck exercise is intended for small groups led by a facilitator. The basic process is as follows:

- Participants should review the APA Ethics Code prior to the exercise.
- The facilitator is responsible for introducing the exercise, managing the discussion, and managing time.
- The facilitator may either randomly draw from the full set of dilemmas or select a sample of dilemmas particularly pertinent to the setting for the exercise.
- Dilemmas may be read aloud by the facilitator or printed for participants to read directly.

- Participants take turns responding first to the dilemmas. After the first person reacts, the discussion is opened up to the full group. *See the accompanying [Ethical Dilemma Discussion Questions](#)*. A copy of the APA Ethics Code (at least excerpts of particular relevance to I-O psychologists found [here](#)) should be available for reference
- The facilitator is encouraged to think ahead about the layers of considerations that may underlie a given scenario. A scenario ostensibly about conflict-of-interest matters, for example, could involve boundaries of competence or other issues as well.
- The facilitator will reserve time to reflect on general lessons learned from the discussion of specific dilemmas.

While the dilemmas offered as part of this package are readily available, this basic process is generalizable to any available set of dilemmas.

Help us Grow this Tool: We would like to add more scenarios to this exercise. If you have ideas of your own or that surface in your group discussions, please draft them into brief scenarios and forward to [CAPE](#). CAPE will review and revise, then add to those here. We also welcome your feedback on the Dilemma Deck tool which we can use to refine it over time.

Paradigms

Paradigm: Prevent Harm

Context: Practice

1. As an external consultant and executive coach, you meet the spouse of a high-ranking corporate officer. She is a life coach with a master's degree in art history and is offering her services to some of the same individuals you are coaching in her husband's corporation. She asks you to provide psychological test results to her on these individuals. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Prevent Harm

Context: Practice

2. You are the Director of Organizational Development for an international construction company. You interview an employee who shares information about a ring of employees who are stealing from the company. You promised to keep her name and information in confidence, but she begins to receive anonymous threats through the Internet. You decide that you must share the details with your boss. He wants to turn over the information to security and give her a severance package to diffuse the situation. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Prevent Harm

Context: Practice

3. You are an I-O Psychologist in a large pharmaceutical company that is hiring new employees with degrees in chemistry. Your brother-in-law has chemistry degree but has just been terminated from his last job because of drinking at work. He is undergoing severe personal distress. You learn he has applied for a position at your company when the VP of HR asks you for a recommendation. If he gets the job, his drinking problem could harm your reputation. But if he does not get a new job soon, his drinking issues will escalate. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Prevent Harm; Temptation

Context: Academe

4. You are conducting a literature review to find data for a meta-analysis on the topic of workplace bullying. You discover that another highly published research team has reused data in multiple studies that could impact the validity of a meta-analysis. If you speak up about this, you fear there will be a hot exchange that could harm you and others professionally. Also, it could halt advances in this critical area of research. On the other hand, you could stay quiet and avoid professional conflict. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Temptation

Context: Academe

5. You are in line to be Department Chair and find an anonymous letter under your door that could destroy the career of a faculty member who is also competing for the Chair position. He has had personal relationships with several graduate assistants. At a faculty get-together you hear a rumor that seems to confirm the problem, but you have no verified information about this situation. You are tempted to give the anonymous letter to the Chair, which could potentially stop the faculty member's apparent predatory behavior and would also likely make you the only candidate for the job. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Temptation

Context: Practice

6. Your supervisor asked you to validate an emotional intelligence test. You were hesitant because you had never done a validation study, but you figured the study would be relatively simple to do. After committing to the project, you learn that a lawsuit is underway, and this validation is an essential part of the defense. Your supervisor says that the validation must be done in six weeks. You are tempted to do the research because you are confident in your ability and want to please your boss. Yet, there is a chance that your validation could be repudiated in court along with your reputation. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Role Conflict

Context: Academe

7. Your best friend on campus was fired in the middle of a semester for falsifying travel reports. As part of the investigation committee, you find letters in his university e-mail files about a romantic trip with the wife of another professor. If you do not report this information, you may be guilty of hiding facts in your report. On the other hand, if you report the information, you will disclose a confidential matter and lose a friend. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Prevent Harm

Context: Practice

8. You are a master's Level I-O Psychologist who was recently hired as an assessor for a large corporation. It's a good career move, but on the first day of work you meet your new supervisor, who was one of your mentees at the university. You are surprised she got the job as she was barely competent in any area of her coursework. As her job involves high-level executive assessments, you are concerned if she will be able to work within her boundaries of competence. You consider resigning, but the pay is good and you are not one who will quit over a problem. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Role Conflict

Context: Practice

9. You are an I-O Psychologist in a large hospital and manage an employee development program. You also serve on the Institutional Review Board. Participants in your program have been told that their personal goals and personality assessments are absolutely confidential. However, you discover that assessment results have been accessed through an HR data portal. If you make this problem public, you believe the employee development program will be terminated. But if you do not act, you will betray the mission of the IRB. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Values Conflict

Context: Practice

10. You are an I-O Psychologist who works for a corporation involved in a sexual orientation lawsuit. Your values are consistent with the idea that all people have the right to be treated fairly, regardless of sexual preferences. But you are tasked with representing the company's interests in court. You feel conflicted about this because you are gay, which is not known by the executives and legal team. You question if you can serve the interests of your employer and be consistent with your values. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Prevent Harm

Context: Academic

11. You are a member of the admissions committee for the MBA Program at your university. The committee members have a solid understanding about keeping all applicant materials (including GRE scores) in strict confidence. But, at a student social, an admissions committee member comments that the new group of students are lacking in academic talent. Especially (says name), "... with a GRE Quantitative at the 15th percentile ... he will be a waste of time." After the event, you have a previously scheduled meeting with your fellow committee member. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Coercion

Context: Academe

12. You are an I-O Psychologist working at a university in a remote part of Montana and teach a class in cog-neuro. Your best friend sustained a brain injury at work and is having difficulty getting insurance approval for benefits. There are only a few days left to apply. It is extremely difficult for him to go to an out-of-town clinic to get the assessment done. He asks you to administer the tests. However, you have no formal training in this area of assessment. Nevertheless, your friend's physician encourages you to do the evaluation and will help you and co-sign the report. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Values Conflict

Context: Academe

13. You are consulting on a grant about a woman's right-to-choose and right-to-life issues. While working on the IRB proposal, you find that you and another consultant have different values on this topic. However, you are shocked when he proposes the use of a cluster sampling technique that will bias the

results. You respectfully point out that this is not sound practice after which he criticizes your competence within earshot of several colleagues. The Dean wants to discuss the matter with you both. What will you say and why?

Paradigm: Values Conflict

Context: Academe

14. You are the chair of a departmental committee responsible for selecting graduate students for an international MBA program. The goal is to accept students with exceptional writing and analytical skills. However, you have a large number of international candidates who are considerably less qualified than those from US programs. Furthermore, your dean asks you to write at least 30 acceptance letters to international students in order to increase the program's international presence. This goes against your deep value for excellence in academics. Who is the client in this situation? What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Coercion

Context: Practice

15. You are an I-O Psychologist hired as a consultant by a chain of restaurants to audit their climate on sexual harassment. You assure your interviewees of complete confidentiality. However, you decide to include information about a specific incident of harassment in the report because you think that it is honest and accurate. After the report is delivered, the corporate HR manager demands that you to tell him who was involved in the incident described in your report. If you don't cooperate, you will be fired as a consultant. But if you do cooperate, you will be violating confidentiality. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Coercion

Context: Academe

16. You are a graduate student who has come up with a thesis topic after months of research. Your advisor likes your idea partially because he can use the data for his own research. He encourages you to skip getting IRB approval, which would slow things down, with the rationale that your proposed research fits with the IRB approval he obtained for a prior project. What would you do and why?

Paradigm: Coercion

Context: Practice

17. You have been engaged by a family business to work on their succession plan. Your primary job is to work with the owner's son to help him develop his leadership skills. The owner says that he needs to be groomed to be President of the company. When you first meet the son, you find him to be abusive and threatening. Nevertheless, you attempt to help him develop leadership skills. You then see him berate a group of employees with uncontrollable anger. Soon afterwards, you receive a call from the father asking questions about his son. Who is the client? What would you say and why?

Discussion Questions for Ethical Dilemmas

After initial discussion of a dilemma, the facilitator may pose one or more of the following questions to stimulate further discussion. In addition, the *APA Ethics Code Excerpts Relevant for Organizational Psychologists*, is a helpful companion for the discussion.

1. Which of the following actions might also be pertinent to the dilemma?
 - a. Seeking confidential advice from trusted colleague(s)
 - b. Consulting formal guidelines, standards, or policies
 - c. Reflecting on personal values
 - d. Reflecting on the values of the organization/profession
 - e. Investigating the facts by gathering more information
 - f. Initiating a conversation with the person responsible for the dilemma?
- 2 Do you think that this incident should have been reported to someone?
3. What would you have done if the dilemma related to law, regulations, or legal authorities?
4. What would you have asked to clarify the ethical conflict?
5. Did you consider if this situation involved mental or physical suffering?
6. What actions could have been taken to minimize harm to clients?
7. How would you have talked about the probable uses of information, who would have access to it, and limits on confidentiality?
9. Could you have commented on how confidential assessments were stored?
10. In this situation, how could you have used professional standards and respect for the person when responding to the dilemma?
11. Did this situation require gaining written informed consent...why/why not?
12. How could a colleague or mentor have been helpful with this ethical dilemma?
13. How would you start a discussion about sexual harassment attributed to a coworker?
14. What actions were taken that reflect a mindset of ethical watchfulness?
15. How does this dilemma relate to boundaries of competence?
16. Could an IRB review *before the dilemma took place* have been helpful in this situation?