

My Ethical Framework

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“Personal ethics is a category of philosophy that determines what an individual believes about morality and right and wrong” (St. Olaf, n.d.). An individual’s ethics shape his friendships, families, and career. But what shapes the ethical choices that we each make, on a daily basis, to varying degrees? For some, a significant event can be a catalyst for their feelings in decision making or impressions are made during adolescence, while others possess less grandiose reasoning. Ethical decision-making tools are a learned behavior and a dynamic, fluid process. My own ethical framework is simplistic, sometimes static, yet influential and beneficial.

Icek Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a psychological model that links one’s behavior with his belief system (p. 141). TPB began as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and is distinguished by the person’s perceived difficulty in achieving the task. TPB formulates that a person’s intent to act ethically is based upon his “attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control” (Collins, 2012, p.142). The three factors each have their own components. The attitude toward the behavior is composed of the strength of the belief, as well as the perceived outcome of the behavior. Subjective norms are the social pressure to respond in a particular fashion and if others would respond in the same way. The perceived behavioral control is the varying mechanism of a person’s perception of the ease or difficulty of the task.

TPB is relevant to me because it actually puts my actions and thoughts into a defined term. Before I returned to college and began to educate myself, I felt like I simply reacted to events for my own specific reason and that it was neither different nor similar to others. Just as

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the contradictions exist between a realist and a subjectivist. (Budd, 2018 p.56) I sometimes feel conflicted in my own ethical framework.

I normally possess a very strong confidence that my initial response is accurate. Perhaps it is a superiority-complex, but I would not make a choice if I did not feel certain that I was acting or speaking in a manner that was legitimate and impartial. I view subjective norms in the manner in which my close friends and, specifically my mother, would respond. Close friends are a scarce commodity for me, as I have a lifelong history of keeping others at a distance. Those who are a fixture in my life have a strong moral compass and view society as I do. My mother also possessed that quality and it strongly contrasted from my father. I cannot blame the distinction on an age difference since one of my brothers also has made very questionable choices. Perceived behavioral control is a highly influential factor since a swift decision is not always the best, or the easiest.

Collins' charted the individual characteristics of ethical decision making and the variables involved (Collins, 2018 p. 139). Two factors which did not have discernable affect were also unchangeable: age and gender. I am a woman who is almost fifty years old so neither of those factors were significant in my examination of self. The top two influences, however, are noteworthy. Additional education and more work experience seem to promote more ethical decision making. Religion was ranked third overall, but I have preconceived thoughts of organized religion, both in practice and the sometimes-hypocritical treatment of others.

When faced with an ethical dilemma, I resolve the conflict through self-questioning. How would my mother feel about my choice? That is usually the first and sometimes only question I need to ask myself. She was a woman of strength, knowledge, and unwavering empathy. If by chance I need additional pause to make a decision, the second question solidifies

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it. “Will I be able to proudly tell my grandchildren about this choice?” My five grandchildren are impressionable and I want to be a good role-model for them. At times I make mistakes but I think acknowledging the error and learning from it can be a valuable lesson, for them and for me.

The different theories are similar in that they all paint a clear picture of how we can and should make ethical choices, in the workplace and our personal lives. No one theory seems superior to another. They each even possess the same flaw – human error. We may be a higher species, but we are susceptible to mistakes. Some of those are the result of intellectual misconceptions, while others fall into the greed/personal gain category. Determining how people make decisions is helpful, yet pointless if ethical decision making is not important to everyone.

Caux Principles for Responsible Business is a collaborative effort that is realistic, complete, and far-reaching. It involves human dignity and working together for the common good (Collins, 2018, p. 114). Respect for myself, others, and the environment are very important to me and have been for as long as I can remember. These traits make me a more empathetic, understanding individual.

I think my ethical framework is not as finely honed and passionate as it could and should be. In situations involving children, animals, and the elderly, I make more thoughtful, sympathetic decisions. I examine the welfare and side-effects of the action or the negative result of not acting. This needs to be a more intrinsic part of my daily life. It would actually be a great benefit if I did not need to even stop and ponder the ramifications of certain actions; if my natural response was always the correct one.

Theory of Planned Behavior plays key role in my ethical decision-making. I am at times both a realist and a subjectivist. My childhood, specifically my mother, my education, and

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extensive work experience influence my decisions and choices. Without the capacity to empathize, I would make very poor choices, some of which I would greatly regret. Through self-reflection, I will learn and grow as a woman, teacher, friend, and fellow human being.

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