

Ethical maturity: Making ethical decisions – Part II

MICHAEL CARROLL

In a recent article, *'Ethical Maturity: Compasses to life and decision making – Part I'*, published in the May 2011 issue of *Psychotherapy in Australia*, MICHAEL CARROLL outlined a five-step model of 'Ethical Maturity'. This follow-on article reviews Step 2 of the model in more detail—*Ethical decision making: how do we, and how can we, make ethical decisions?* Carroll considers what ethical maturity means, reviews decision making in general, and focuses on five components of ethical decision making; emotions, reason, complexity, discerning the emerging future, and reflection. A simple adherence to our ethical codes or frameworks can extinguish any sense of personal ethical responsibility and means we often work to minimum standards rather than standards of excellence. This article attempts to redress that balance and re-instate personal responsibility as a key factor in ethical maturity. The concept of 'ethical maturity' is used here to move from simple ethical decision making to a larger picture of ethical excellence of which ethical decision making is a part. Ethics is not a one-size-fits-all procedure, but a tailor-made experience where there are some givens and a lot of adaptation.

In a recent article (Carroll, 2011) I outlined a five-step model of *'Ethical Maturity'*. The steps were:

1. Ethical sensitivity—awareness of when and how ethical issues and dilemmas arise.
2. Ethical decision making—how to make an ethical decision.
3. Implementing the decision made—knowing what helps and hinders me in bringing my decision to action.
4. Being able to justify and defend the decision to self and others if needed.
5. Ethical peace and completion—living with the decision even when I have doubts about its sustainability.

While this is partially a sequential model, I do not see it as linear. Ethical decision making, the implementation of ethical decisions, and the rationalising of the decision all add to ethical sensitivity. More aptly, the steps could be called components that interweave and influence one another while there is some chronological sequence played out, e.g., the implementation of ethical decisions comes before ethical peace and sustainability.

This follow-on article reviews Step 2 of the model in more detail—*how do we, and how can we, make ethical decisions?* We will consider what ethical maturity means, review decision making in general, and then 'zone in' on five components of ethical decision making.

Ethical maturity

The concept of *'ethical maturity'* is used here to move from simple ethical decision making to a larger picture

of ethical excellence of which ethical decision making is a part. For too long codes and frameworks have been used as the sole criteria for competency in making ethical decisions. For example, Allan (2010), in the Professional Association's Research Network (third publication on professional ethics), put forward *'the view that ethical competence—stated as the ability to work at an occupation in a manner as defined by professional ethics of conduct but not limited to these codes in detail—is central to trustworthy practice'* (p. 125). While no one could doubt this statement, a simple adherence to our ethical codes or frameworks means we often work to minimum standards rather than standards of excellence. Bond (2006) makes the point clearly: *'For all sorts of laudable reasons, our collective professional ethics have been driven by a concern to set minimum standards for the safety of clients'* (p. 77). He talks about moving from an ethics of *duty* (this is what I ought to do, should do, because my

Footnote: By 'ethical decision making' I am referring to the process of making discerning judgements about the rightness or wrongness of events, situations, actions, individuals, groups or organisations.

code tells me—i.e., the minimum), to an ethics of *trust* (where ethics is based on faithfulness to relationships and the welfare of clients is central to the process of what decisions are made). Earlier, Bond (2005) traced the history of how ethical professional codes came into existence and names Thomas Percival (1740–1804) as a key person in this development. Asked by the Manchester Infirmary to ensure the hospital never again closed its doors on needy patients during an epidemic (two major surgeons resigned which resulted in closing the hospital), Percival and a committee devised a code of medical ethics. He was the first person to use the terms ‘medical ethics’ and ‘professional ethics’. His new code did several things that were new:

- It took ethical responsibility away from the individual and located it firmly with the profession. A collective responsibility took over from individual responsibility.
- The new code was written in a very different tone and voice from previous codes. It was written in the second and third person rather than the first person.
- The code tended to be constructed as rules, which in turn gave rise to the tenet ‘*what is not explicitly forbidden is permitted*’. This again resulted in the mentality of ‘what

is the minimum I need to do in order to fulfil my professional responsibilities?’ and, in Bond’s words, can result in ‘skilled and informed obedience’. Bond (2005) points to the numerous examples where obedience to the rules, such as the Enron scandal and the Nuremberg trials, demonstrate how ‘*externalising in ethical responsibility onto a supervisor authority can extinguish any sense of personal ethical responsibility*’ (p. 13).

these so that we move to high levels of ethical competency.

Making decisions

Ethical decision making falls within the wider sphere of decision making in general. Decision making is part and parcel of everyday life. People make decisions not just on a daily basis, but minute to minute: what will I eat; will I get up now or stay in bed for another hour; what will I wear today; how will I manage my next door neighbour who

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This article attempts to redress that balance and re-instate personal responsibility as a key factor in ethical maturity. To say ‘*I followed my code of ethics*’ or ‘*I only did what I was told by my professional body*’ is not sufficient to be seen as ethically mature. It may save you from ethical complaints and justify to you and others that what you did was not unethical. However, it can still be a far cry from ethical maturity. This is not a matter of principles versus relationships or directives versus trust—it is more an integration of

is causing me anxiety with the noise he is creating; is it time to change my car? Many day-to-day decisions are made automatically without much thought: I touch the brake on the car as I come to a red light; I brush my teeth in the morning as part of my daily routine of facing the new day. Others are made with a lot of thought and deliberation: Will I change my career from being a dentist to an interior decorator with all the family and financial responsibilities I have?; Will I undergo chemotherapy for this malignant growth or try to

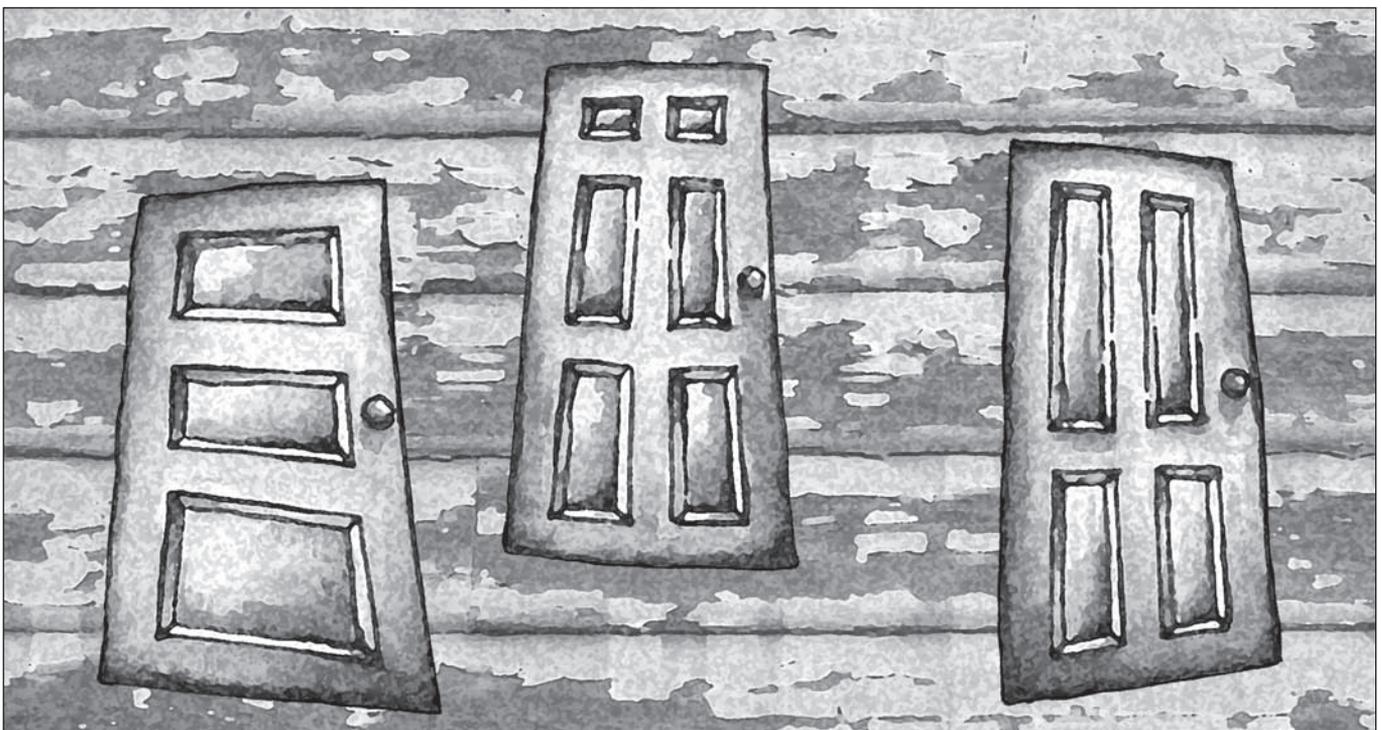


Illustration: Savina Hopkins

treat my illness with less invasive procedures?; Will I report poor professional conduct from a colleague?; Will I break confidentiality because I think this client is in danger (Ousep's dilemma in the previous article)? Some are simple decisions about what I might wear today (though my wife might disagree that this as an example of a simple decision). Other decisions are incredibly complex: how should I respond to environmental needs? Ignore them, stop travelling by aeroplane, give money and/or join an ecology group?

Langer (1989) is particularly strong on how a lack of mindfulness builds up in life and results in poor learning—we move into routines that imprison us and blind us to new information.

Unconscious decision making is a necessary part of life. It would be difficult to get through each day if every decision made was subjected to reflection, consideration and attention before acting. In fact, most of our decisions are made on an unconscious basis. This fits in with the way our brains work. Brains are very demanding on energy (it is suggested that our brain uses 20–25% of our energy) and this energy saving device attempts to move us into automaticity (routines and habits) as a way of saving that precious commodity. Our brain would have us make decisions unconsciously and works hard to help us create habits, routines and procedures that demand little thought or reflection. Langer (1989) is particularly strong on how a lack of mindfulness builds up in life and results in poor learning—we move into routines that imprison us and blind us to new information. Socrates was the champion of waking people up and almost forcing them to think. His famous remark that *'the unreflective life is not worth living'* attests to this—Socrates saw the danger in automaticity or routines. Routines tend to lower our choices and offer us ways of life that become part and parcel of who we are without thinking them through. It is

easy to move towards fundamentalist positions regarding choice and to lead lives based on a series of unthought-through assumptions that impact and influence behaviour. Religions, cults and organisations often want us to adopt unconscious thinking and decision making processes. They lead towards compliance and less conflict.

The decision making cookbook

How are decisions made? What are the ingredients that go into making decisions and, in particular, into the making of ethical decisions? I am

going to outline five elements or factors here. Not all five are needed or used in all decision making, but access to all five provides the best basis for making mature ethical decisions. The five are:

- emotions;
- reason;
- complexity;
- discerning the emerging future;
- reflection.

1. Emotions and decision making

A number of authors have re-installed emotion as a key factor in decision making. Leherh (2009), who draws on contemporary insights from neuroscience, is one of those authors: *'The simple truth of the matter is that making good decisions requires us to use both sides of the mind. For too long, we've treated human nature as an either/or situation. We are either rational or irrational. We either rely on statistics or trust our gut instincts. There's Apollonian logic versus Dionysian feeling; the id against the ego; the reptilian brain fighting the frontal lobes. Not only are these dichotomies false, they're destructive...there is no universal solution to the problem of decision making. The real world is just too complex...Sometimes we need to reason through our options and carefully analyze the possibilities. And sometimes we need to listen to our*

emotions. The secret is knowing when to use these different styles of thought. We always need to be thinking about how we think' (p. 5–6). While recognising there is no single answer to this, Lehrer has re-introduced the role of emotion into decision making and warns us that we ignore our feelings in decision making to our peril. Pizarro (2000) goes a step further claiming that *'affect can actually aid moral deliberations...when asked to make a judgment, individuals reference their mood and use it in aid for their subsequent judgement'* (p. 360). For Pizarro, emotions support reason by focusing our attention on a particular problem. He concentrates on the emotion of empathy as a key factor in ethical decision making.

An example of decision making using emotion took place in Melbourne when I was running the two-day programme on ethical maturity. Participants were engaged in the following exercise: think of a decision you have been trying to make or a decision where you have had trouble coming to a clear course of action. Now, try to make that decision based on feelings and emotions alone. It was an exercise I had never asked a group to do before and was curious about how it might work. At feedback time, processing the exercise, the group was intrigued by a woman who courageously shared her experience, *'I have been trying to make a decision for nine months: I have talked, reasoned, thought about it, and looked at it from every angle. I brought it here unresolved. Today I made the decision in fifteen minutes with the help of the people in my small group who would not allow me to move away from my feelings. I had not been listening to my feelings. I now know what to do'*.

I would not be so bold as to think those fifteen minutes were all that this woman needed to make a major decision she had struggled with for a considerable amount of time. No doubt the nine preceding months of thinking through and trying to resolve had paid some dividends. Perhaps the fifteen minutes where she allowed the feelings to communicate were the final icing on the cake. I don't know. Damasio (1994) has argued that emotions in general help speed up the decision making process and perhaps



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that's what happened here. However, whatever the process that resulted in a clear decision where none had been available previously, I realised then the importance of allowing emotions a mammoth say in ethical decision making. Perhaps, as Lehrer says above, this woman needed this 'style of thought' at this time to make this decision.

Of course, I have not discovered something new. Advertising has long known the important role of emotions in making decisions. Rarely do ads try to convince us about the reasonable or rational thing to do—what they try to do is evoke an emotion within us that will influence our decision to buy. Psychographics (in contrast to demographics) is a branch of marketing that uses psychological insights into the minds of individuals and groups to target how they might be persuaded to buy certain products. One part of this approach is defining the feelings that might make a product appealing to a group, e. g., what feelings do I want to elicit in a 16 year old girl to get her to buy this shampoo, or what emotions would entice this 40 year old woman buy this type of car, or what feelings would influence this 60 year old man to come on this type of holiday. Advertising knows we make decisions emotionally, as well as rationally. Research on the brain, as Fine (2007) and Lehrer (2009) attest, has added

weight to recognising the emotional bases of many of our decisions. Fine outlines its emerging influence: 'One of the hottest new topics in psychology is the clout our emotions wield over our

logic, and that is all that is needed to make human decisions. Kant not only saw reason as the primary tool in ethical decision making, but was adamant that emotions were

...I realised then the importance of allowing emotions a mammoth say in ethical decision making.

choices' (p. 31). Fine gives us her take on the role of emotions in decision making, 'Too much emotion and we wind up barling over a ballpoint pen someone has taken from us... Too stingy with the emotions and the simplest decisions become irredeemably perplexing. Dampen down the emotions too much and we begin to lose grasp of our precious sense of self... better hope that your emotional brain is doing a reasonable job' (pp. 50–51). When do we make ethical decisions emotionally? When do we access our feelings as part of our decision making?

2. Reason and decision making

For a long time, in the tradition of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Descartes and Kohlberg we have assumed that our human ethical decision making is a rational process. We are human, we use reason and

detrimental to moral reasoning and moral judgment (Pizarro, 2000). This tradition, that the reasoning process was the only valid process in making ethical decisions, has had a major influence even today (see Steare, 2006; Kohlberg, 1982). Indeed a number of existing models in making ethical decisions carry on this tradition (Carroll, 1996; Gabriel & Casemore, undated; IACP, Undated). It is quite easy. If you have to make a decision (e.g., buy a car or leave your partner, or decide to visit a client in hospital who is ill) then see it simply as a logical, reasonable set of sequential steps you go through to reach the right decision for you. In general, the stages of problem solving follow the outline of what we would call 'a rational approach to decision making':

- What is the problem? Clarify it; ensure you are clear about what the real problem is.
- Look at the options you have. Get them all out on the table.
- Evaluate these options one by one (you can look at the needs and responsibilities of various stakeholders if you want at this stage).
- Choose the best one for you.
- Implement it.

In a recent article, Duffy and Passmore (2010) critique this approach: *'A sequential linear series of steps greatly over simplifies the complex process of solving an ethical dilemma and has its own weaknesses. Such an approach is in danger of seeing dilemmas as simple decisions in contrast with complex or chaotic issues'* (p. 142).

They offer a sequential model, which they do not see as linear, that moves through six stages called the ACTION model:

- *Awareness*: ethical awareness.
- *Classify*: identification of the issue as it emerges in practice and the ability to classify the issue as the dilemma.
- *Time* for reflection, support and advice.
- *Initiate*: articulate a number of solution options.
- *Option* evaluation.
- *Novate*: implement and incorporate the answer into one's ethical journey (see also Passmore & Mortimer, 2011).

Using reason alone as the basis of decision making has come under some recent scrutiny and criticism. From a background in South Africa, Breen (2011) suggests the use of reason alone can be at the root of some evils, *'Logic classifies, and within classes, everything must be the same. Logic encourages separateness, class war and apartheid. Logic lacks humanity. Logic gave Plato stability. Its abstractions offered a more satisfactory world altogether—a world of eternal truths, where there would be no change... the other functions of the psyche—feelings, sensation and intuition—were the dross. Without feeling, thinking is necessarily destructive'* (p. 133).

Sometimes the use of reason on its own works well in making decisions and in making ethical decisions. Some types of decisions are prone to rational

decision making and, at times, that is all that is needed. Making decisions about which way to set up a traffic system that runs smoothly can probably be done rationally, logically and reasonably. As can my ethical decision to refer a client for medical help.

3. Complexity and ethics

Snowden and Boone (2007) warn us about a too-simple approach to decision making and point out that the relationship between cause and effect is a key component in how we see problems, and in how we set out to resolve them. They refer to *'a fundamental assumption...that a certain level of predictability and order exists in the world'* (p. 1). Not so, they say, and outline four contexts based on the relationship between cause and effect in making decisions:

Simple Contexts: cause and effect are clear—an answer is self evident. I am asked by a Manager to give her some specific information on a coaching client I have been seeing for the Company. The contract does not include giving information back to the Company. The answer is clear. I tell the manager I cannot provide the information. I have worked out my decision using reason alone; a simple decision resolving a straight forward problem or issue. However, simple problems can also involve simple emotional reactions that in turn can lead to a clear cut and immediate moral decision. Pizarro (2000) gives us such an example: *'An individual may not give a second thought to decrying the actions of a young man who trips up an elderly woman, leaving the woman with clear, vivid signs of injury...in this case, the immediate empathic arousal (seeing an innocent victim in distress) leads to a judgement, and then prescribes an action'* (p. 366).

Complicated contexts: cause and effect can be clear, but not seen by everyone—there are a number of answers. More analysis is needed to come to a decision. An HR director asked me to give him information on how resilient or robust was the individual I was coaching. He told me that the person was going to be made redundant, but because of his history of depression he was prepared to postpone telling him if I, his coach,

felt he (the coachee) was not strong enough to hear this news. While it seems a 'simple decision' to make, in fact it was much more complicated and needed time to analyse, look at different perspectives and evaluate what my role was and might be. I ended up telling the HR director that, in my professional opinion, the coachee was strong enough to deal with being made redundant. I had, in this case, to use both reason and feeling, and the help of my supervision group to resolve a complicated issue.

Complex contexts: Right answers are not obvious and have to be worked towards. There is something about waiting for the way forward to appear. We don't know *a priori* what to do—it's not a given. Critchley (2010) captures this in the context of coaching: *'Thus the coach puts him or herself fully at risk 'on the high road' of coaching. The low road consists of a rather dry and instrumental coaching process that keeps both parties relatively safe and protected from the risk of fully embodied relational engagement. The high road requires the coach to be capable of self awareness and reflexivity, to allow themselves to be subject to the process of relating rather than to be in control of it and hence to be open to being changed by the interaction'* (p. 855). Implicit in this stance is the lack of knowledge in advance about what to predict or indeed what to do. That emerges from the relationship as, *'a series of gestures and responses, patterns of meaning emerge. This is a spontaneous dance of meaning making in which neither party can predict the other's response'* (Critchley, 2010, p. 859). This makes a bit of a mockery of having an existing response outside the relationship. How can I possibly know what I will do, ethically or otherwise, if I am not in relationship with another? *'Do not touch your client'* can be wise advice, but it must be seen, interpreted and made sense of in the light of a particular relationship, the individual client and the context in which we are working.

Critchley (2010) places this in the wider context of complexity theory (as do Snowden and Boone [2007]): *'What we are learning from complexity science is that there appears to be a self organising principle in nature whereby order emerges from apparent disorder. The order cannot be predicted from the*

initial starting conditions but pattern emerges through interaction. If we are to stay with complexity theory as having some basis in reality then we realise we cannot start with the ethical issue resolved, i.e., it is difficult to have the answer to what I would do before I am able to assess what has happened. The moment to moment relationship is a changing process about human interaction. *I know what I will do in advance* is not really a human response—it's more robotic. It is treating human behaviour as if it were water in a bucket from a stream rather than a moving, fluid, changing process called a river. Can the ongoing, flowing, changing relationship with its moment to moment demands become the forum within which decisions are made? This seemed to be the case when Thorne (1987) presented a controversial ethical example where he worked with a client named Sally, during which she sometimes removed her clothes. He talks about *'massaging with great gentleness her stomach, her shoulders and sometimes her buttocks'*. How does he justify what in ordinary circumstances would be seen as a serious breach of ethical protocol. *'Intuitive promptings'* he writes, *'enabled me to encourage Sally to undress, or on occasions to initiate a particular form of physical contact, whether it was simply holding hands or, as in the final stage, joining in a naked embrace'*. More recently, he has backtracked somewhat and declared that such behaviour took place *'when an altogether different culture prevailed ... the chapter describes work which was totally exceptional and remains unique. It was never intended to be a 'model' for others'* (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 28 January, 2010).

Could we understand that this particular relationship and this particular intuitive response were what the client actually needed therapeutically, or do we, in advance, decide that such action should not be acceptable, and even if of some benefit to the client, should not be viewed as within ethical boundaries. How far can we look to *'intuitive promptings'* as a valid guide to action?

Chaotic contexts: Here the relationship between cause and effect is impossible to determine because they shift constantly and no manageable

patterns exist. Snowden and Boone (2007) suggest that the way forward is to staunch the bleeding and be aware that, *'A deep understanding of context, the ability to embrace complexity and paradox, and a willingness to flexibly change leadership style will be required for leaders who want to make things happen in a time of increasing uncertainty'* (p. 8).

We give up our 'pet' theories that have become prisons rather than freedoms. What we think we control, may well be controlling us.

I could imagine a traumatic event such as the kind of mass killings we have seen in recent years as falling within this category. How do we help without intruding or imposing? What is the best thing to do immediately, in the short term, and in the long term?

Knowing what kind of decision we are facing when we have an ethical problem or dilemma (simple, complicated, complex or chaotic) might help us in deciding what to do.

4. Discernment, decision making and the emerging future

Decision making involves the future. In the present, hopefully using the past and its lessons, we decide what to do. We are preparing the future when we make decisions. St. Ignatius struggled with this in the Middle Ages and had a particular interest in what he called *'discernment'*—how can I know what to do? In this context, his interest was *'doing the will of God'* and spending time discerning or trying to discover what *'doing the will of God'* was became an important issue in his life. He provided a few hints that can still help us today as we struggle with what future decisions we will make.

For him discernment was the ability to *'sense the new and its impact'*; to be open to new signs that indicate what might be required from us. The head, the heart, intuitions and feelings all played a part in his process of discernment. Key to uncovering this discernment was what Ignatius called *'Indifference'*: Are you open to what might be asked from you? Can you be indifferent to what it might be?

For him, indifference did not mean disinterest or being dispassionate—quite the opposite. How can I be passionate and fascinated by the future, and yet indifferent to whatever demands it makes? In other words, using all our faculties (emotion, reason, intuition), creating an attitude of openness to the future (I am indifferent

to what the demands of the decision will mean for me); I begin to allow the future to speak to me.

In modern times Otto Scharmer (2007) uses the terms *'sitting at the feet of the emerging future'* to describe a similar method of decision making. He is sceptical, and with good reason, about our ability to predict the future—upon which many of our decisions are based—and suggests we create environments, relationships and conversations that allow the future to emerge. His six stages are somewhat linear and sequential:

Suspending—seeing our seeing

The first stage in discerning futures is the ability to suspend existing judgements and *'truths'*. This involves two sub-stages. In the first we allow ourselves to go into neutral stance and leave aside (for the moment) our judgements, evaluations and ways of making meaning. We sit and we observe without forming conclusions—we stay with the pieces and don't try to relate to them (we camp out beside the problems, as someone once said).

In suspending our habitual way of thinking and judging, we automatically enter the second sub-stage—we notice the mental models and maps that make up our habitual ways of thinking and making sense of reality. We see our seeing. We notice our prejudices, our personal investments, our needs to control, our intentions and from where within us comes motivation. Suspension requires patience and a willingness not to impose re-established frameworks or mental models on what we are seeing.

Redirection—seeing the whole

We now redirect attention to the sources and begin to think more systemically. In connecting the details and seeing the relationships involved, we allow the system to emerge. Now we develop a new relationship with the problems and the issues. We stay with our feelings, our intuitions and our reactions. But we go deeper. If Stage 1 helps us see how we see and enables us to suspend our seeing, then Stage 2 provides us with a new framework for perceiving. In redirecting our gaze we are concentrating, we become mindful and see from within an emerging whole.

We now talk of ‘gut-knowing’, ‘mind-knowing’ and ‘heart-knowing’. We are open to the new possibilities—what we could create, what might happen. We have larger intentions, we think bigger. We are no longer confined by our ethics of duty or obligation, but by a wider commitment of trust and concern and compassion. We reflect in ever-widening circles. We are in relationship with self, others, world—the relationship is one of co-creating and not alienation or separation. Perhaps we need silence. We slow down. We see from the bigger picture, from contexts. We think systemically.

Letting go

In Stage 3 we surrender, we wait with open heart, open mind and open will. We give up control, security, greed, publicity, compulsions, our competitiveness, our perfectionism, our drivers and our fear. We may have to leave aside our cherished loyalties to an approach, a value or an orientation. This links to Ignatius’ sense of indifference—I am truly not invested in any one outcome, any one way of doing my work, any one theory

or framework. We give up our ‘pet’ theories that have become prisons rather than freedoms. What we think we control, may well be controlling us. The more we hold on to our compulsion, the less we are able to see. And the less we are able to see—the more blindly we stumble into the future.

Letting come

Having changed our way of seeing and making meaning, we now wait. We are attentive to the moment, to what is emerging. We watch, we notice, we observe, and we listen. We don’t clutch at it. We don’t rush to define it. We allow it to speak. We wait patiently, creatively. We do not soothe our anxiety by finding a quick solution. When we try to control the future, we define it by what we fear. Out of mistrust, we push, we interfere, and we grasp too quickly. The story of the helpful person who tries to help the caterpillar become a butterfly is well known. There is an old African saying that a baby takes nine months to develop no matter how many people are on the job. ‘Letting come’ means allowing the future to emerge fully—as it chooses to come which is often beyond our current conceptions. It means trusting that the future can

be much, much bigger than we can envision.

Capturing the vision

As we begin to envision what seeks to emerge, we also begin to attempt to focus it in a form of communication that has meaning for us. This is not an easy stage; often we wrestle with the words. And so it should be because these will be the words that make a difference to us. These are the words that we will translate into actions.

Implementing it

Finally, we work out the emerging future in a commitment and a plan of implementation. We act to make it work—pragmatically from within, and across, a deep knowledge of ourselves as individuals and as social systems. We act with the people we have learned to trust—through a journey we have trusted to unfold.

Both Ignatius and Scharmer present ways in which we create insights and awarenesses (discernment) about how we make decisions. How might we apply the above to ethical decision making?

5. Reflection

One of our best human gifts is the ability to reflect. In previous publications (Carroll, 2009, 2010) I

Figure 1: Conscious and unconscious decision making

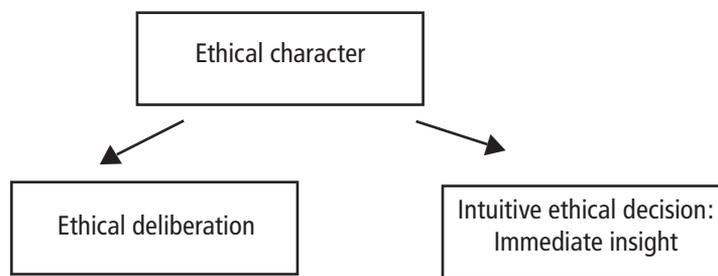


Table 1: The Six Levels of Reflection

LEVEL	ABILITY FOR REFLECTION	STANCE/ATTITUDE	CONNECTION QUALITY
1	Zero	Me	Disconnected
2	Empathic	Observer	Empathic
3	Relational	You and Me = Us	Personal
4	Systemic	You and Me + Others	Contextual
5	Self	I (internalised)	Incorporating
6	Transcendental	Other (universal)	Universal

have looked in some depth at what reflection means and, in particular, at levels of reflection—our ability to move from surface to deep reflection. I have suggested six levels of reflection, each of which allows us to view and review events in our lives from six different perspectives. I am not suggesting that one level is better than another, but am making the point that we often get ‘locked into’ a level of reflection that doesn’t allow us access to other perspectives. So fundamentalists, by and large, remain at level one—reflecting within their existing mindsets and not allowing other levels to enter their sphere of decision making. Having empathy with your enemy and seeing it from their point of view (level 2) can influence how you relate to him or her. Cognitive (perspective taking or role taking) and/or emotional empathy (identifying with the feelings of another) allow access to another level of decision making. Having access to all six domains of reflection gives us the best possible reflective basis for making ethical decision—we can see the event from a number of different viewpoints. Table 1 outlines these viewpoints.

It would be a valuable exercise to look at what ethics and codes of ethics might mean if designed from within one level of reflection alone. For more information on what is reflection, how we can teach reflection, the six levels of reflection and examples of using reflection in decision making see Carroll (2009, 2010).

Reflection would seem to be the main feature or characteristic of ethical decisions that are made deliberately and over time. ‘Not having time to reflect’ or the inability to get psychological distance from events (which reflection allows one to do) can result easily in unethical behaviour (Baumeister, 1997).

Pulling it all together: Ethical decision making

Figure 1 outlines the two ways we can make ethical decisions—either consciously and deliberately or unconsciously and intuitively. Both approaches are based on what exists before—our moral character that has been built up over time. Varela (1992) has created an image of how these two

connect and differ: he compares them to the difference between a truly wise person and the village honest person. The village honest person is someone who will know what to do in a specific situation provided there is sufficient time to think about it and to make a considered decision. The truly wise person, in contrast, does not have to stop and consider what action to take.

...if I am reluctant to talk about this or share it with others, then I may need to review the decision I have made or the action I have taken.

Through a process which Breen (2011) describes as ‘*extension, attention and intelligent awareness*’, the truly wise person just acts in accord with the situation (p. 147).

Before making an ethical decision

Ethical decisions are not made on a blank page where there is no past. We come to our ethical decisions with an already formed ethical approach—what I call an ethical or moral character. This character has been built on the past, on who I am, on previous decisions made and all those elements that go into making up the person we are in the here and now. We already have what Pizarro (2000) calls ‘*antecedent belief systems that are at work in the mental set of the individual*’ (p. 365). These existing belief systems/mental mindsets moderate and mediate emotions when faced with real life situations. These emotions, in turn, greatly influence the moral decisions we make, e.g., having a mindset that a certain group of people are enemies and ought to be destroyed can result easily in a moral decision to kill someone. That decision may not be rational (thought through deliberately), but based on the emotional reaction of being faced with an enemy.

Where we are, the values we hold, the contexts in which we have lived, the past from which we have come, and the experiences and learning we bring with us, all impact on how we will make ethical decisions. If I am feeling defensive about a decision I am about to make, or guilty that I did

not live up to my own expectations, ideals or values, then how I go about making a decision will be affected by how I feel. If emotion is running high it might obscure my thinking as I process the issue. On the other hand, if I am wholly rational and do not allow my feelings to impact my thinking, then I can be out of relationship and not resonating with others. Some

individuals come from backgrounds where they were expected to turn to authority for the right answers—when making an ethical decision they may have a tendency to first ask, ‘*What does the authority to which I subscribe say about this issue?*’, and may subsume their own feelings, thoughts and reactions into the directives of the authority. In helping relationships (whether counselling, psychotherapy, coaching, consulting, supervision or even management) a key issue is always around how individuals are viewed and how relationships become arenas for power, engagement and emotional attunement. Any decision I make, ethical or otherwise, rests on my view of people and how I relate to them. That in turn has been carved from my past. The research on evil and harm shows how difficult it is to hurt or harm those whom you see as people like yourself. Depersonalise; view as commodities, paint others as threats and we can do all sorts of horrendous things to others (see Baumeister, 1997). Being ‘in relationship with’, having emotional connections to and attunement with (Lewis, Amini & Lannon, 2000), being able to empathise—all these build in moral compasses that include us in a relational ethics of trust. Bond (2007) also uses the term ‘trust’, even calling it the ‘missing ethics’, and eventually describes the ‘tenets of relational trust’: ‘*Trust is a relationship of sufficient quality and resilience to withstand the challenges arising from difference, inequality, risk and uncertainty*’ (p. 436). Our

attitudes, our values and our ability to relate to and engage with others, our sensitivity to differences all mould, define and colour the ethical decisions we will make. Ethical decisions are not decisions that stand on their own or are made without any previous influences—quite the opposite—who you are and what you have become almost make the ethical decision on their own. Bond (2007) connects the two: *'The strength of an ethics of relational trust...It increases the potential for resolving ethical dilemmas bilaterally and dialogically'* (p. 441). Pruyne and Bond (2011) explain this in the context of narrative theory: *'There are two kinds of stories we need to learn to tell. The "big story" is the story of who we are across time—a story of identity and purpose. The "little story" is the narrative arc in the moment as we encounter the moment to moment challenges of our lives and make moral choices of consequence'* (p. 10). The 'big story' to which they refer is what I am calling moral character, the 'little story' is how we implement that ethical character in the ethical choices we make on a daily basis.

Intuitive ethical decisions

Based on ethical character, many of our ethical decisions are made unconsciously—we don't need to think about them. They are instinctive, emotional and intuitive choices. They are based on who we are. As Varela (1992) writes: *'When one is the action, no residue of self-consciousness remains to observe the action externally'* (p. 34).

At times we are drawn up short with insights into our moral characters that leave something to be desired when our first response, or even our intuitive response, is examined. The following example illustrates this. I had to make an ethical decision about whether or not I should work with a coaching client who was referred to me. Because of his criminal background, I was anxious in case there might be repercussions were it known I was coaching him. I realised as I considered what to do that I was putting myself and my professional safety at the centre of the ethical decision. As I began to shift the centre away from myself to others (the client, the profession, values) I realised suddenly how confined I had

made myself and how I had somewhat imprisoned myself in a position that would most likely mean I would refuse to work with this particular client. Somewhat embarrassed by my narrow self-centred focus on my own safety, I managed to relocate the focus. I made a decision to work with the client knowing it was professional risk. My awareness of how I had put my own safety as the foundation of the decision allowed me to shift and open up other possible decisions for consideration. My

awareness also allowed me to look at my ethical decision making processes and review whether or not this was a characteristic ethical beginning point for me when faced with an ethical dilemma. Interestingly enough, I found it was. Now, I have to be careful that I don't unconsciously allow that stance to be the only one when making an ethical decision. I want it to be part of the ethical equation, but not the sole tenet on which I decide. Sartre's comment, that we know our values from our behaviour, was evident in the example above.

This is an example of how ethical decisions can be almost made before we have moved into a formal and conscious decision making place. I am not saying this is necessarily bad or unjust, but by recognising my lack of openness to other values means recognising predetermined stances that allow for little or no negotiations. I supervised a counsellor whose own value set refused her permission to allow the young people she worked with to proceed to termination (abortion) if they came for counselling with that in mind. It was an option that was not in her repertoire to allow because of her strong and committed values as a pro-life adherent. Part of my job was helping her see her non-negotiable ethical stance and looking with her at the implications of this for her and for her clients. It was certainly not my job to try to change her values.

I too have non-negotiable value sets in my personal and work life and have refused to work with certain companies because of what they produce and sell. I have no doubt that it is valuable to revisit and re-evaluate those non-negotiables occasionally so that I don't get so set in my ways that I am not open to change. However, we cannot come with no values, no principles—there are no value free relationships.

Good questions for trainers and supervisors are: How is moral character

Ethical maturity is recognising and living with the 'sometimes', and not being fazed in the face of the uncertain or the unknowing.

formed and what impacts on its formation over time? How can we support, help and coach individuals in developing their moral character as the basis for their ethical decision making?

Entering the ethical arena

Making ethical decisions makes us ethical, and the more we make and deliberate on decisions made, the more we create an ethical attitude and an ethical stance that leads to an ethical character. Bell (2002) backs this up, *'ethical living is a process you go through so that as each new situation arises the inclination to choose ethically is stronger in you, even if the right path is less clear'* (p. 36). In turn, ethical character results in ethical intuition where we just know what we need to do. It was a thoughtless act on my part over Christmas when I noticed an elderly lady leave £10 on the counter where she was putting stamps on her cards. Without thinking (thoughtless in that sense), I lifted it, caught up with her and gave her the £10. I wouldn't have thought of doing otherwise—it would not have crossed my mind to keep it. It is an intuitive part of my life to tell a cashier that he or she has given me the wrong change as it is to return something I have found that is not mine. I wish I was as morally intuitive in other areas of my life. I am not and therefore have to move into deliberation and conscious decision making mode.

There are times when it is crystal clear what the ethical thing to do is. You know it—it comes to you in a flash, it is obvious. You don't need reflection, deliberation or working through. Like me and the £10 note, no thinking or pondering is needed. You know unconsciously and intuitively (and often emotionally) what you should do. These are decisions built on the past and known by you often through the fires of experience that have resulted in building your moral character. It is who you are. Some might object that this form of making decisions is far too subjective and open to all kinds of abuse. It is always worth reviewing your moral character and there are a few tests that might help substantiate your decision if you think that your moral intuition leaves something to be desired. Bringing values to the fore and re-examining them helps. You can subject your decision to all those questions in the Ethical Conversation that justify or articulate why you did what you did.

- Would I recommend this course of action to others?
- Could I accept others doing what I have decided to do?
- If I were in front of a complaints committee how might I justify my course of action?
- What does my supervisor think about my decision?

One small guideline for me is: if I am reluctant to talk about this or share it with others, then I may need to review the decision I have made or the action I have taken.

John Dean in his autobiography, *'Blind Ambition'*, talked about how he found himself breaking the law for Richard Nixon and contrasted what he was doing with the previous idealistic young lawyer who was setting up a life to help bring justice to the poor. He used the image of a bell ringing to let him know what was right and wrong. The first time he did wrong, the bell rang loud and clear. He ignored it. He talked about the time coming when the bell stopped ringing because he no longer listened to it. We have inner bells too about what is ethically right and wrong. But all too easily we can ignore them and after a while the bell rings no more. Your moral character has changed.

There are some grounds for thinking that we have, and are born with, a moral intelligence, i.e., that we are born with an innate sense of morality about what is good and bad. However, just as we are born with an innate ability to speak, we still have to learn to speak. So we have to learn to be moral. Just as context impacts on the language we use, and indeed on our use of that language, so context influences our moral stances. Lennick and Kiel (2005) call their book *'Moral Intelligence'* and distinguish between *moral hardware*, the moral intelligence with which we are born and which is our internal moral compass and *moral software* which they see as moral competence—how we learn to act in accord with what is right and wrong. The moral software is upgraded as we journey through life still very connected to the 'nurture' side of development: we have to develop our inborn ability to know what is right and wrong. Context, relationships and experiences all contribute to that ability and, like language, can influence how proficient we become in making ethical decisions and being ethically mature.

Ethical deliberation

Ethical deliberation, unlike ethical intuition, takes time and conscious work to reach ethical decisions. It too will be somewhat (but not entirely) based on moral character and we will still be influenced by the attitude with which we enter the process of decision making.

But here we have time to examine, to reflect, and to create an environment for ourselves in which a decision will be made with deliberation, reflection and thoughtfulness. What can help us here is:

- Indifference and openness to the outcome. Am I open to possible outcomes and prepared to go with whatever emerges?
- Having both courage and compassion—to be open and prepared to implement decisions that may be personally or professionally costly.
- Dealing with my fear.
- Allowing myself to reflect in deepening ways and beginning to think systemically, as well as individually.

- Staying with my feelings, even when painful.
- Being curious rather than evaluative.
- Knowing what I need to let go of.
- Keeping the context and its many challenges in mind.
- Looking with deliberation at the basis of how I might make these decisions:
- Asking when will authority (others, codes, principles, supervision) guide me?
- Considering how my past experience will be of help?
- Considering if I can I involve my feelings in this particular decision?
- Considering what part reason can play as I make up my mind?

When we are in ethical decision deliberation mode, then it is worthwhile not just to make a decision deliberately, but to spend time looking at the process or processes that can be of best help to me in making this particular decision. What will I base the decision on?

Conclusion

This article has focused on how we make and can make ethical decisions that are mature. The result: how we make ethical decisions depends. That seems to me to be the mature stance. Sometimes I make decisions, including ethical decisions, one way and sometimes another. There is no one guaranteed method, sequential, linear or otherwise, that ought to be our guideline. Sometimes emotion guides me, sometimes reason. Sometimes a combination of both is used where I 'think feelingly'. Sometimes I allow authority to be the basis of my decision, sometimes my own experience. Sometimes I rely on the experience of others, sometimes I go with my intuition. Sometimes the decision is immediate and needing no thought; sometimes the decision is made after short or long deliberation, reflection and attention. Sometimes I make the decision in a flash; some decisions take years to make. Sometimes I have no time and must make an immediate decision; sometimes I have no idea what to do and must wait patiently for an answer to emerge in its own time. Sometimes the decision is made unconsciously;

sometimes a lot of conscious effort is needed. Sometimes ethical codes guide and support me; sometimes they are of little help. Sometimes I play it safe, and sometimes I take risks. Sometimes there are non-negotiables when I dig in and refuse to budge, and sometimes there is lots of leeway and possibilities opening up myriad decisions. Sometimes there are universals and injunctions I cannot afford to ignore, and sometimes there are rules I break because they are not in the welfare of my individual, team or organisational clients. Sometimes I know and sometimes I haven't a clue. Sometimes I am scared and anxious, and sometimes brave and determined.

So what was the point of two articles on ethical maturity and ethical decision making if we end up with the conclusion that 'it all depends... sometimes I rely on one approach, and sometimes another'? Doesn't this end with a rather chaotic and unstructured approach to ethical navigation? While unsatisfactory in not offering clear answers to specific questions, I think this approach is more in keeping with modern life and contemporary living. Life and work are complex and complicated, and at times chaotic. In that context we make decisions with more options in our decision making than we have ever had before. Not having one definitive way (or even two or three) faces us with how we make decisions and challenges us to let go of certainty and immerse ourselves in 'real-time' ethics where often there are no 'givens'. However we make them, good ethical decisions are defensible by reason and need to be justifiable. Steps 3, 4 and 5 of the model accompany Step 2—making ethical decision is one step on the route towards ethical maturity.

If 'sometimes' is the operative word here and the conclusion is that mostly there is no one right way to make ethical decisions but many, then the abiding skill must be one of knowing when I go with one and when I go with another method. Ethical maturity is recognising and living with the 'sometimes', and not being fazed in the face of the uncertain or the unknowing. Ethics is not a one-size-fits-all procedure, but a tailor-made experience where there are some givens

and a lot of adaptation.

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AUTHOR NOTES

MICHAEL CARROLL Ph. D. is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist and an Accredited Executive Coach and Supervisor. A counsellor, supervisor, trainer and consultant to organisations in public and private sectors, he specialises in employee well-being. He has lectured and trained nationally and internationally. Michael is Visiting Industrial Professor in the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol and the winner of the 2001 British Psychological Society Award for Distinguished Contributions to Professional Psychology.

He is author of *Training Counselling Supervisors: Strategies, Methods, Techniques* (1999), *Counselling Supervision in Context* (1999), *The Handbook of Counselling in Organisations* (1997), *Counselling Supervision: Theory, Skills and Practice* (1996), *Workplace Counselling* (1996), *Integrative Approaches to Supervision* (2001), *Becoming an Executive Coachee*, with Maria Gilbert (2008), *On Being a Supervisee: Creating Learning Partnerships* (2nd Edition), with Maria Gilbert, PsychOz Publications, 2011.

Comments: MCarr1949@aol.com



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