THE ETHICS FRAMEWORK

What ethics are:
Ethics refers to a standard of behaviour that tells us how human beings ought to act in many situations in which they find themselves. Business ethics is the conduct by which companies and their agents abide by the law and respect the rights of their stakeholders, particularly their customers, clients, employees, and the surrounding community and environment.

What ethics are NOT:
- Feelings
  - Feelings provide important information for our ethical choices, but often tell us the right thing is uncomfortable, so feelings are not a reliable decision making tool.
- Religion
  - Most religions do advocate high ethical standards but do not address all problems we face.
- Following the law
  - A good system of law does incorporate many ethical standards, but law can deviate from what is ethical.
- Following culturally accepted norms
  - Some cultures are ethical, but others become corrupt - or blind to certain ethical concerns.
- Science
  - Social & natural science can provide important data to help us make better ethical decisions; but science alone does not tell us what we ought to do.

HOW TO MAKE AN ETHICAL DECISION:

RECOGNIZE THE ETHICAL ISSUE

ASK YOURSELF:
“Could this decision be damaging to someone or some group? Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative?”
“Is this issue more about what is legal or efficient? How?”

GET THE FACTS
1. What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known?
2. Can I learn more about the situation? Do I know enough to make a decision?
3. What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons & groups been consulted? Have I identified creative options?

EVALUATE ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

UTILITARIAN
- what option will produce the most good & least harm?

RIGHTS
- what option best respects the rights of all who have stake?

JUSTICE
- which option treats people equally?

COMMON GOOD
- which option best serves the community as a whole?

VIRTUE
- which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be?

MAKE THE DECISION AND TEST IT

considering all these approaches, which option best addresses the situation?

ACT AND REFLECT

? how can my decision be implemented with the greatest care & attention to the concerns of all stakeholders?

? how did my decisions turn out & what have I learned from this specific situation?

WHY IDENTIFYING ETHICAL STANDARDS IS HARD:
It is sometimes difficult to recognize an ethical situation.
It takes practice to apply standards to ethical dilemmas.


Adapted from A Framework for Ethical Decision Making by Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University.