

Navigating Moral Dilemmas

Facilitation Guide



Tool for
Moral Character

 **60 minutes**

 **Educator-prep
K-12 educators**

Materials

- A partner or a small group
- The moral dilemma scenario (either the example provided or examples provided by the instructor or group)
- Something to write with to take notes
- An open and curious mind

About this Guide

Moral dilemmas are situations in which two or more moral values are in conflict with each other, and the nature of the decision we must make forces us to abandon one or more of our values.

Imagining how we might respond to such situations by considering scenarios and using reflection questions aligned with principled innovation can help us prepare for a time when we experience a true moral dilemma or challenge in our own lives or learning environments. Below is a sample scenario that you might use to get started.

Consider gathering your own scenarios from personal experience, or ask your students or teammates to share scenarios they have experienced in the past, and use the questions to explore different ways to respond to the situation.

Making Connections

Principled Innovation asks us to work with others and recognize the limits of our own knowledge so that we can better understand and tackle the complex issues our communities face.

Connecting Character Assets:

[Fairness](#)
[Critical thinking](#)

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Instructions

1 Read the following scenario together

An instructor is concerned with a student's recent assignment. This student, who is an international student from China, turned in a paper that had portions of text that were obviously copied from published journal papers. The student had cited these articles at the end of their paper, but made no effort to change or summarize the original text in their own words. During a conversation between the instructor and the student to address the instructor's concerns, the student was clearly distraught and apologetic. The student stated they were unaware that what they had done was considered plagiarism. They explained that it is common practice in schools in China to not alter original text from academic experts, since they are seen as the authority on a given subject. The instructor must decide how to proceed.

2 Discuss the following questions

- What ethical concerns or implications exist in this scenario?
- What are the moral values that are in conflict?
- What assumptions or judgments were made?
- How did they (instructor and/or student) listen and remain open to all perspectives?
- How could biases or perspectives influence the approach taken and decisions made?
- How could they (instructor and/or student) recognize and acknowledge what others are experiencing, thinking, and feeling?
- Has the instructor explored the context and complexity of the issue as fully as possible?

3 Reflect

Considering the perspectives of both the student and the instructor, discuss with your partner or small group what the next steps could be. Below are reflection questions to prompt your discussion.

- How would this decision reflect the instructor's commitment to the well-being of the individual, community, and society?
- What are other ways they might respond?
- What are some of the possible intended and unintended consequences of this decision?
- How might a different decision affect the possible outcomes?

4 Act

Identify a moral dilemma or challenging situation that you are currently experiencing in your work or personal life and use the following questions to help you consider the moral and ethical aspects of different decisions. Or, use the [Guide for Decision-Making](#) through Principled Innovation to explore the situation and consider your different options for action.

- What ethical concerns or implications exist in the decision I need to make?
- What are the moral assets that are in conflict in this situation? (e.g. Fairness and Compassion, Honesty and Kindness, etc.).
- What is my clear mission & vision, and how might I align my decision with my mission & vision?
- What are my values, and how might they help me to navigate this dilemma?
- How am I remaining aware of my biases as I explore next steps related to this situation?
- What are my possible choices for action?
- Why do I believe this is the right decision? What are the reasons this might not be the next right decision?
- How might others perceive this decision or action? Could it be seen as unethical or immoral to others? Why or why not? How might I navigate these differences in perception?
- How will this decision affect others?
- What other choices do I have in this situation?
- What does action look like in this situation? Who do I need to consult with prior to taking action?

Reflective questioning helps us explore the different possibilities and make the decision that feels like the right fit. Try to avoid getting stuck in reflection, though. It's better to try a solution than be paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake.

Afterwards, examine your choice... How did it go? What have you learned from this experience? What would you do differently next time?