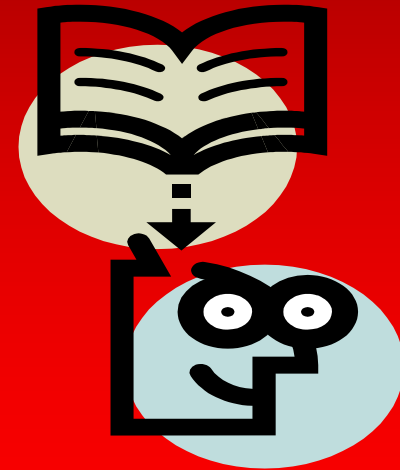


Leave No Stone Unturned: The Inclusive Model of Ethical Decision-Making

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Ethical Decision-Making: A Working Definition

- The process of critical reflection, evaluation and judgement through which a practitioner resolves ethical issues, problems and dilemmas.



Ethical Issues

- Issues around individual rights & welfare
- Issues around public welfare
- Issues around equality, difference & structural oppression
- Issues around professional roles, boundaries and relationships

Banks, S. (2006)

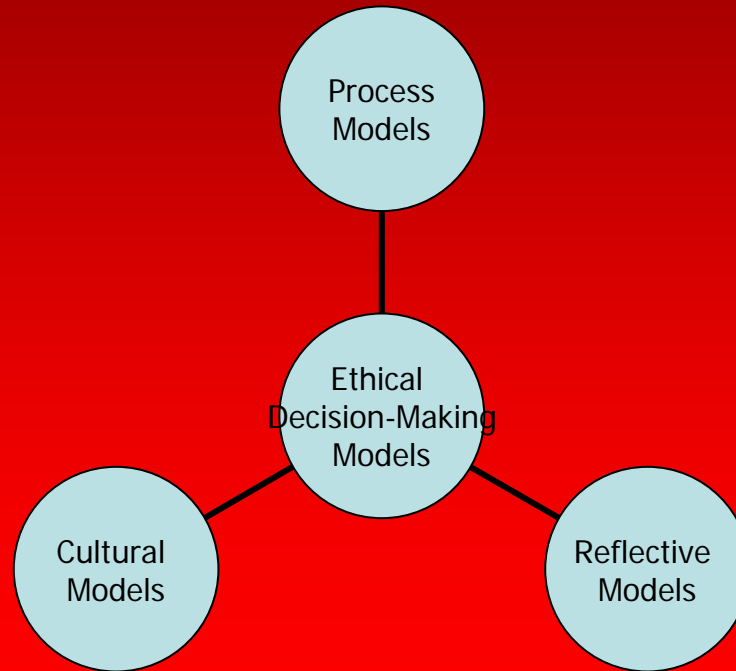
Ethical problems

- A situation is interpreted as involving a difficult moral decision, but the course of action is clear

Ethical dilemma

- Practitioner faces a choice between two equally unwelcome alternatives, which may involve a conflict of moral values, and it is not clear which choice will be the right one.

Ethical decision-making: Constructed models



Process models

- Clear structure
- Defined steps
- Linear sequence
- Checklist
- Ranked values and ethical principles
- Consider both obligations (duties) and consequences but lean more towards rule-based

Reflective models

- Based on feminist perspectives
- Encourage inclusion of clients in decision-making
- Question use of power
- Importance of relationship
- Importance of self-reflection

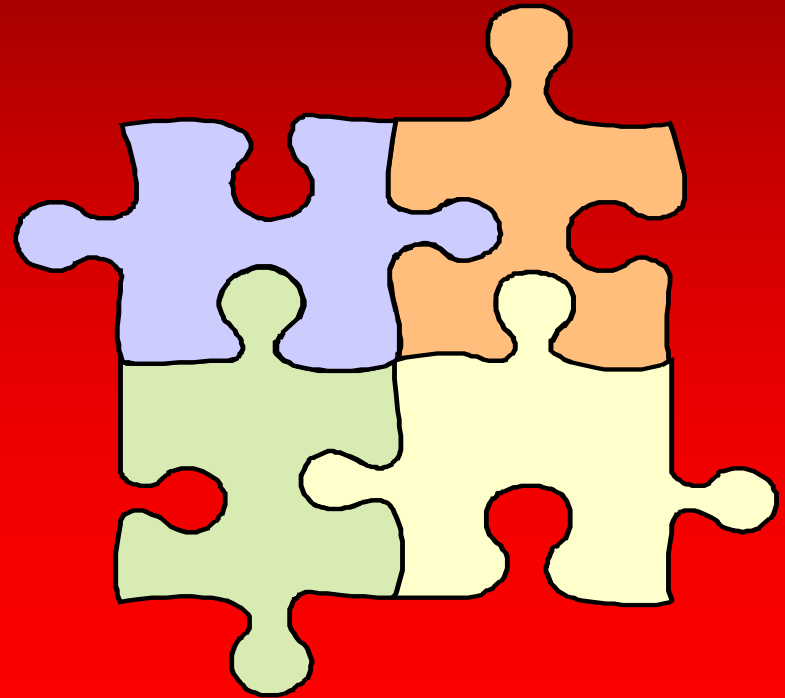
Cultural models

- Few examples of these models but more expected to emerge
- Central focus on cultural context
- Scrutiny of policies/processes for potential cultural discrimination

The Inclusive Model of Ethical Decision-Making

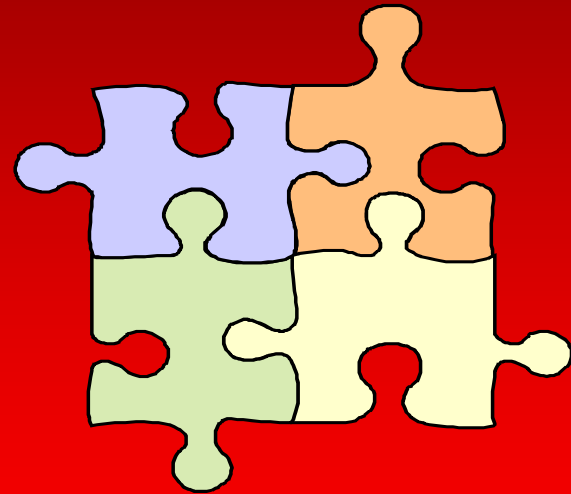
(Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2005)

- An attempt to take the best from previous models and construct a model inclusive of all potential stakeholders and 4 important principles



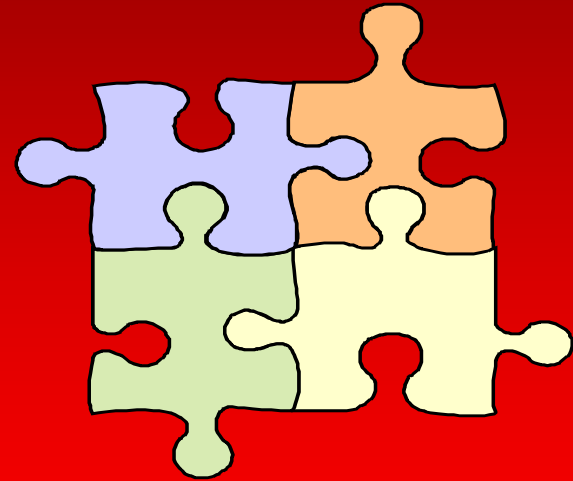
Accountability

- The ability to make decisions that can be clearly articulated and justified and take into account the personal, professional, organisational, legal, cultural and social context



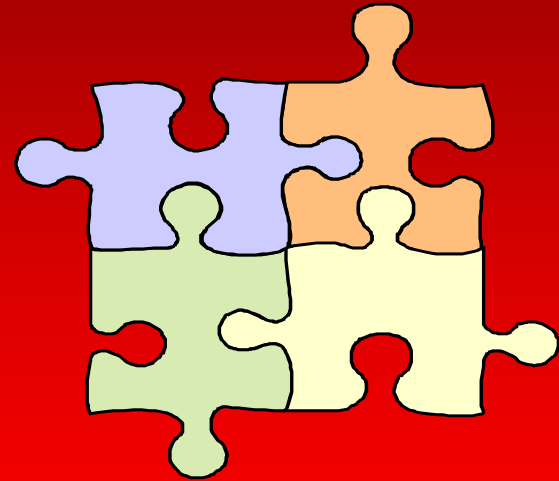
Critical reflection

- The ability to make decisions that can be scrutinised by others, clarify practice and lead to better practice in the future



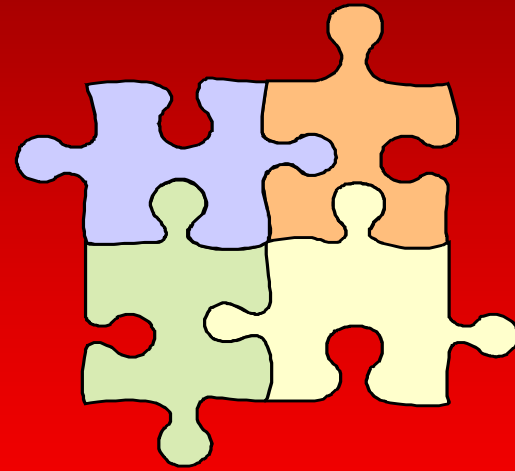
Cultural sensitivity

- The ability to make decisions that are culturally appropriate, taking into account different value positions and drawing on cultural expertise



Consultation

- The ability to use resources wisely and to engage in appropriate discussions with others who may assist accountability, cultural sensitivity and personal reflection



Case study

Helen is a social worker working in a hospital. She has a client, Caroline who is terminally ill. Caroline asks her if she would be able to find her some information about the legal situation in relation to assisted suicide. She says that her sister has agreed to assist her to die at home but she wants to be sure that there will be no legal repercussions. She asks Helen not to tell any of the doctors and nurses on the ward about their conversation.

STEP ONE

Defining the Ethical Dilemma

- Ethical dilemma formulation
- _____ Vs _____

Key Questions

- Is this an ethical dilemma and can I clearly define the competing ethical principles? Do I need to talk to someone to help me sort this out? (consultation)
- If this is an ethical dilemma and if a decision needs to be made, is it my place to make the decision or should it be referred to someone with higher authority? (accountability)
- Have I come across this situation before and how comfortable am I about making such a decision? Can I draw on past experience or does this situation require new knowledge? (critical reflection; cultural sensitivity)

STEP 2

Mapping Legitimacy

- Who has a legitimate place in this situation?
- Who should be included in this decision, and who should not?



Key questions

- Which people have legitimacy in this situation? Are there any cultural considerations?
- Is it appropriate to share my ethical dilemma with any of the legitimate players, and if so, when and how should I do it? Am I the only one who has an ethical dilemma or is the ethical dilemma I am facing also shared by others? (consultation)
- If it is not appropriate to share my ethical dilemma at this time, why not and what are the implications? (accountability; critical reflection)

STEP 3

Gathering Information

- Policies, procedures & protocols
- People
- Lessons from the Past



Key Questions

- What guidance do your professional values, ethical codes or practice standards provide?
- Is there a conflict between personal values and professional expectations? (critical reflection)
- What organisational policies, procedures and/or protocols relate to the situation? (accountability)
- What are the legal considerations?
- What actions could bring you into conflict with your employer, or the law? Are there conflicts between personal, professional and organisational values?

Continued...

- Are there other resources you can access to get information? Have you consulted literature or research? (consultation)
- Who could you consult at this stage to clarify your position or gain new knowledge? Supervisor or line manager? Colleagues from within or outside human services?
- What are the implications of discussing the situation outside your workplace (e.g partner, family, friends?) Is this appropriate? Is this ethical? (accountability)

Continued

- Do you need to consider cultural knowledge and world views different from your own? Who can you consult for cultural expertise? (cultural sensitivity)

STEP 4

Alternate approaches and action

- Weighing up the options and alternatives
- How do these become prioritised?
- Reliance on ethical theory and moral frameworks



Key questions

- What courses of action are available now that I have more information about professional, organisational, legal, societal and cultural expectations and responsibilities?
- On what basis will I make a decision? Am I more concerned with weighing up possible consequences or with following agency procedure or the law? Am I prepared to breach an ethical code or agency policy or deliberately break the law? How will I justify my actions? (accountability)

Continued

- Do I need to talk these options through with someone in case I am missing other possibilities? If so who can I consult?
- Are any of the alternatives culturally insensitive or discriminatory? If so, should they be discounted?
- How do I feel about the possible options? (critical reflection)
- Now that I have weighed up the possibilities, is there a decision I would be able to live with and justify if called upon? How and where should implement the decision?
- How and where should this process be documented? (accountability)

STEP 5

Critical analysis and evaluation

- Knowledge gained
- Confidence built
- Impact on self and practice



Key questions

- What have I learnt about my decision-making process by working through this ethical dilemma? Was this different to ways I have made decisions before?
- Have my views changed and have I been challenged at a personal or professional level? Do I feel confident that I acted in a culturally sensitive way?

Continued

- From my experience, can I offer any suggestions to others about guidance I did or did not receive from ethical codes, practice standards or organisational policies? (consultation)
- Am I comfortable with the final outcome, and would I be able to justify my actions? Would I be comfortable telling others about the experience? Would I be comfortable standing in front of my peers and owning my decision? Would I want others to take my behaviour as an example? (accountability)

Reaching conclusions

- A word about documentation
- Importance of developing an integrated professional approach to ethical decision-making – need to build up avenues of consultation, support & expertise
- Consider undertaking an ‘ethics audit’ of organisational policies and procedures to ascertain areas of potential risk

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- Reference: Chenoweth, L. & McAuliffe, D. (2005) The Road to Social Work and Human Service Practice: An Introductory Text, Thomson, Melbourne.