

Parker’s Criteria for Ethical Decision Making

These criteria blend different types of ethical consideration. The first two (1 & 2) relate to the decision maker’s character – both are elements of personal integrity. The next two (3 & 4) relate to the decision maker’s particular situation insofar as this affects the decision – both are factors that could steer the decision wrong. The final three (5, 6 & 7) related to the consequences of the decision – all three are socially desirable states of affairs.

In effect, these criteria ask the decision maker to look inside him or herself, look at his or her particular circumstances, and look to the future welfare of society. If the answer to all seven questions is, “Yes,” then a person with integrity will accurately determine the most socially beneficial path and take it. Society would be OK if this were true of all decisions in business.

Parker’s discussion makes it clear that if the answer to one or more is, “No,” then the decision should NOT be adopted. This follows from the fact that a “no” means the decision maker has to 1) abandon his or her personal integrity, 2) knowingly pick a biased or faulty decision, and/or 3) intentionally harm society.

The seven criteria, or questions, are:

1. Is it **honorable**? -- Is there anyone from whom you would like to hide the action?
2. Is it **honest**? -- Does it violate any agreement, actual or implied, or otherwise betray a trust?
3. Does it avoid the possibility of a **conflict of interest**? -- Are there other considerations that might bias your judgment?
4. Is it within your area of **competence**? -- Is it possible that your best effort will not be adequate?
5. Is it **fair**? -- Is it detrimental to the legitimate interests of others?
6. Is it **considerate**? -- Will it violate confidentiality or privacy, or otherwise harm anyone or anything?
7. Is it **conservative**? -- Does it unnecessarily squander time or other valuable resources?

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1 Parker, et. al, *Ethical Conflicts in Information and Computer Science, Technology, & Business*. 