

Ethical matrix

The ethical matrix is based on the work of Ben Mepham. It is used to structure moral tensions around a societal issue, often in order to inform decision-making.

The simplest construction of the ethical matrix is a table consisting of columns, which refer to relevant principles and rows referring to several relevant stakeholder groups. The main analytical activity is to imagine what a specific principle (say 'autonomy') means for a specific group of actors (say 'parents'). Just write in the relevant cell, the issue at stake (in this example: right to decide the best for the family).

1. Draw an empty ethical matrix on the blackboard, filling in only the elements in the top row (i.e., "consequences" and "principles").
2. Discuss which actors should be included in this matrix for the case you are dealing with.
3. Fill in the ethical matrix for all the relevant actors.
4. Then look for tensions, conflicts or dilemma's between any of the things you have written down in the cells in columns two (consequences) and three (principles), and mark them with arrows.

Discuss the fact that these conflicts are rooted in the values related specifically to the interested parties (woman, man). Their different interests might all be legitimate, whilst still conflicting with each. All possible choices will probably entail that one discards some or other independently valuable position/value/principle, which one perhaps is reluctant to do.

Tensions/ conflicts/ dilemma's might exist within a specific actor group (e.g., "woman": to minimize the pain and (psychological) suffering that comes with having an abortion *versus* to be able to lead an autonomous life and being free to decide whether or not one is ready/ capable/ willing to become a mother) or between groups (e.g., "woman" *versus* healthcare professional: autonomy *versus* & loss of income).

5. Try to come to a shared decision on which tension/ conflict/ dilemma is most important, and search for arguments towards the resolution of this.
6. Then formulate a policy recommendation regarding the case, building on all previous steps. Make sure you explicitly formulate an ethical justification for your recommendation. (I.e., argue why you weigh some consequences (for some parties) heavier than others, and why you give priority to some principle(s) rather than to others.)

