HEAD FORWARD
LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

Ethical Decisions Questionnaire

Ethical decisions under pressure | A practical questionnaire for managers and senior leaders

What do you do when the right decision is the uncomfortable one? Ethics gets interesting when doing the right thing costs you time, money, approval or a comfortable conversation.

Before you write

Make a copy of these blank pages so you can repeat the exercise. Allow about 15 minutes, plus time to test your answers with evidence.

Answer from experience

Think about the past six months. Score what you actually do - not what you would say in a leadership interview. Managers should consider their own decisions and team. Senior leaders should also consider the decisions they approve, reward or allow across the organisation.

0 Never

1 Rarely

2 Sometimes

3 Usually

4 Consistently, with specific examples

Use N/O if you have not encountered the situation. Do not award yourself points for an untested intention. Add recent examples on the reflection page.

Name / role / date

LOOK AGAIN Answer as the leader your people experience. Your imaginary best self can sit this one out.

This original reflection tool is not a validated assessment or proof that someone is an ethical leader. Its score bands are practical prompts, not research benchmarks.

HEAD FORWARD
LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

Ethical Decisions Questionnaire

Questions 1-10 | Past six months

0 Never · 1 Rarely · 2 Sometimes · 3 Usually · 4 Consistently · N/O Not observed

1. Before I decide someone is “difficult”, do I check what actually happened rather than relying on someone else’s version?
Score: _____

2. When I think I’m right, do I genuinely listen to someone who sees it differently?
Score: _____

3. Before making a difficult decision, do I look for alternatives - even when I already have a favourite?
Score: _____

4. Do I consider who will carry the consequences of my decision, especially someone who might struggle to push back?
Score: _____

5. If someone asks, “Why did they get that opportunity?”, can I give a clear, fair explanation?
Score: _____

6. When an opportunity comes up, do I look beyond the people I know best or find easiest to work with?
Score: _____

7. If my strongest performer behaves badly, do I address it - even when their results make them convenient to keep happy?
Score: _____

8. When someone needs different support, do I try to understand what would help rather than immediately calling it special treatment?
Score: _____

9. Before a big decision, do I make room for someone to say, “I don’t think this is a good idea”?
Score: _____

10. After someone challenges me or raises a concern, do I continue treating them fairly - including when opportunities are allocated?
Score: _____

“They get results” is useful information. It is not a permission slip.

HEAD FORWARD
LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

Ethical Decisions Questionnaire

Questions 11-20 | Past six months

0 Never · 1 Rarely · 2 Sometimes · 3 Usually · 4 Consistently · N/O Not observed

11. If a concern is about me, do I step back so someone else can examine it fairly?
Score: _____

12. When someone brings me a concern, do I explain what happens next and follow up, rather than leaving them wondering?
Score: _____

13. If a friend, relative or personal interest is involved in a decision, do I declare it and arrange appropriate safeguards?
Score: _____

14. When a target or bonus encourages the wrong behaviour, do I question it rather than saying, “That’s just how the business works”?
Score: _____

15. When reporting results, do I include the awkward facts - even when leaving them out would make me look better?
Score: _____

16. When the deadline is tight or the boss is pushing, do I still pause if the decision could put people at risk or treat them unfairly?
Score: _____

17. When I get something wrong, do I own it and help put it right without making someone else carry the blame?
Score: _____

18. For an important decision, do I record why I made it - including the trade-offs - so someone else can understand my reasoning?
Score: _____

19. After a decision is implemented, do I check how it actually affected people rather than assuming silence means everything is fine?
Score: _____

20. When someone delivers great results, do I also check how they got there before rewarding them?
Score: _____

“They get results” is useful information. It is not a permission slip.

HEAD FORWARD
LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

Ethical Decisions Questionnaire

Your score and what to do next

Each area has four questions and a maximum of 16. Add all five areas for a total out of 80.

Evidence and judgement - questions 1-4 _____ / 16

Fairness and opportunity - questions 5-8 _____ / 16

Voice and accountability - questions 9-12 _____ / 16

Integrity under pressure - questions 13-16 _____ / 16

Ownership and follow-through - questions 17-20 _____ / 16

TOTAL _____ / 80

If any answer is N/O, leave the overall band unassigned. Record points earned out of the maximum available (four points per answered question). Identify how you will examine the untested areas; do not compare this provisional result directly with a complete score.

Guide for a complete score

64-80 | ON TRACK You report generally consistent habits. Test them against examples and feedback; work on your lowest-scoring area.

48-63 | LOOK AGAIN Useful habits are present but uneven. Choose two weak habits and add a practical check before your next significant decision.

32-47 | RED FLAG Important safeguards are unreliable. Arrange a structured review with an appropriate leader or adviser and strengthen oversight of consequential decisions.

0-31 | PRIORITY ACTION Substantial gaps need attention. Identify immediate concerns, seek appropriate support and put clear controls around decisions that could harm people.

For each area: 13-16 = maintain and check evidence; 9-12 = strengthen consistency; 0-8 = make this a development priority.

RED FLAG Every answer scored 0 or 1 needs its own review. A high total cannot cancel out a serious issue.

Evidence of retaliation, deliberately misleading reporting, unmanaged conflicts of interest, concealed misconduct or knowingly harmful shortcuts requires action regardless of the score. Use an appropriate review or reporting route independent of anyone implicated.

You cannot average your way out of punishing someone for speaking up.

HEAD FORWARD
LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

Ethical Decisions Questionnaire

Check the evidence and act

A specific example supporting my highest score

What someone affected by that decision might say

A situation exposing my lowest score

Try This Monday

Choose one real decision you are about to make. Use the questions below before deciding.

Decision / who benefits / who carries the risk

Whose perspective have I not heard? What evidence could change my mind?

What will I do differently? Who will check the outcome, and when?

Senior leaders: use a suitable confidential or independent channel for honest feedback. Asking direct reports to publicly rate your ethics may tell you more about their survival skills than your leadership.

Repeat after 90 days with new examples. Improvement means changed behaviour and better decisions - not becoming better at completing the questionnaire.

Reference basis
Themes informed by CIPD, Profession Map: Ethical practice (cipd.org), and OECD, Public Integrity Handbook (2020), chapters on leadership, openness and responsibilities (doi.org/10.1787/ac8ed8e8-en). OECD guidance is written for the public sector; its principles informed this workplace reflection tool. Neither organisation created or endorsed these questions or score bands.