

Ethical decision steps

Work through a dilemma in a clear order, so the decision holds under pressure.

STEP	WHAT YOU DO	ASK YOURSELF
1 Spot it	Name the dilemma and everyone it touches	Whose interests collide here?
2 Get the facts	Separate what you know from what you assume	What would change my mind?
3 Check the rules	Law, contract, policy and your code of conduct	Does a rule already settle it?
4 Weigh four lenses	Virtue, utility, duty and rights	Where do the lenses disagree?
5 Decide, act, explain	Tell those affected; record it; check later	Could I explain it in public?

Our own five steps. The four lenses follow Jónasson and Ingason, Project: Leadership (2018), ch. 7.

WHAT IT IS

A code of conduct sets the floor, but cannot foresee every case. These five steps are **our own design** for the rest. Step four weighs the options through four classic ethical theories, **virtue, utility, duty and rights**; Jónasson and Ingason (Project: Leadership, 2018) advise using all four. Where the lenses disagree, you have found the real dilemma: say so, and take it to whoever may decide.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01 Virtue lens:** which choice fits the person you want to be?
- 02 Utility lens:** which option gives the best overall result for everyone affected?
- 03 Duty lens:** which rule should hold for everyone, whatever the result?
- 04 Rights lens:** whose rights could this option harm?

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A city team has eight months to move resident parking permits online with a supplier. While a change is priced, the supplier invites the project manager to its conference, travel and hotel paid.

Spot it: a possible conflict of interest. Facts: the trip is worth far more than a token gift. Rules: the city's gifts policy, and every code of conduct asks for interests to be declared. The lenses agree. The project manager declines, tells the sponsor, and notes it in the project log.

In the exam: Name the dilemma, the facts, the rule that applies and one or two lenses. End with the decision, **who you told**, and how you recorded it.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A city is joining 14 online services under one login over 30 months. Before the city council election in month 20, a board member asks to launch one service early.

Accessibility testing would not be finished, so some residents could not use the service. The project manager takes the lenses to the steering board openly: the rights and duty lenses weigh against an early launch. The board keeps the tested date and minutes its reasons.

In the exam: Show ethics as **part of governance**: shared rules, declared interests, a safe way to raise concerns, and board decisions minuted with their reasons.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
4.4.2 Personal integrity and reliability: values in every decision (4.4.2.1); codes of conduct: 4.3.3.3	Standard §3.6: Be an Accountable Leader; PMI's code of ethics. Exam outline: Business Environment task 1 (ethics)	BoK (APM's Body of Knowledge) §4.6.3 Ethics and standards: code of conduct, speaking up. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) objective 15

Sources: Jónasson & Ingason, Project: Leadership; IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, PMBOK® Guide, 8th ed.; PMI, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2025); PMI, PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); APM Body of Knowledge, 8th ed.; APM Code of Professional Conduct (2024); APM, PMQ handbook (v6, 2026)

Key: IPMA = International Project Management Association; ICB4 = IPMA's Individual Competence Baseline (4.4.2 etc.: its competence elements); PMI = Project Management Institute; PMBOK® Guide = PMI's body-of-knowledge guide; PMP® = PMI's Project Management Professional; APM = Association for Project Management. Unofficial study material for IPMA®, PMI® and APM exams. Not affiliated with, endorsed by or approved by IPMA, PMI or APM, and not an accredited or endorsed training provider. IPMA® and IPMA ICB® are registered trademarks of IPMA in Switzerland and other countries. PMI, PMP, CAPM and PMBOK are registered marks of Project Management Institute, Inc. APM is a trade mark of the Association for Project Management. Other marks belong to their owners. PMP® exam facts are from PMI's public PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); check the current version on [pmi.org](https://www.pmi.org). APM's qualifications are its own; this series is not an APM Accredited Provider or APM Endorsed. Examples use a fictional city and its projects. Levels (this series' labels): Mid-level = moderately complex projects (IPMA Level C, PMI's PMP®); Senior = complex projects and people (IPMA Level B, APM's Chartered Project Professional).

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