Deciding Values

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Isolation is the worst possible counselor.
—Miguel de Unamuno, Spanish philosopher

DECISIONS WHETHER TO tell patients the "whole" story (including uncertainty, ambiguity, and bad news) to honor professional responsibility, to minimize legal liability, to provide safe and high-quality care, and to enhance programmatic and institutional financial health (not to mention survival) are values based. That is, they reflect what matters to the decision maker(s) in a given situation.

Indeed, we would be hard pressed to come up with any decision or issue (public, private, or professional) that is not at bottom defined by values—our beliefs about what is useful, important, worthwhile, or desirable. Certainly, the issues at Paradise Hills Medical Center (chapter 3) are defined by values. So how should healthcare executives, board members, and other managers, whose main "products" are decisions, apply this observation?

In a culture that still feels the effects of the nineteenth-century positivist separation of "fact" from "value," we find ourselves without a robust language or strategy for seeing, naming, and working with values. We are confident that as long as we are dealing with facts, we can make progress. And so we search for "hard" data to lead the way. In the Paradise Hills case, would a right decision become clear if we had more conclusive data on the adverse effects of the accidental radiation, or if hospital policy were clear-cut as to who the ultimate decision makers are, or if the hospital had an in-depth analysis of projected market share over the next five

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This chapter describes a values-based decision-making process and tool developed by Joan McIver Gibson, PhD, and her colleague Mark Bennett, JD, of Decisions Resources Inc. The authors' book A Field Guide to Good Decisions: Values in Action *(2006) explains the entire process and includes cases and work tools.*

259

years? Probably not. The decision makers still must navigate a sea of conflicting interests and values.

As soon as someone raises the specter of a values discussion, however, many people fear a slide into the black hole of private, subjective, and interminable discussion. Such discussions are not helpful when things need to get done. This chapter introduces a process of values-based decision making for executives and managers in healthcare institutions. The process also is transferable to virtually every decision-making facet of life: professional, public, and private.

THEORY AND HISTORY

Are values really separable from facts? Do values enter decision making only when we specifically invite them in? Scientists and philosophers over the past half century have dropped the fact–value dichotomy as outmoded and unhelpful at best, and as wrong at worst. They observe that all reasoning—from the beginnings of language development through complex theory building—is the attempt to create, reflect on, and communicate meaning. Reasoning is the process of making meaning, or valuing. To label something as "factual" is to make a very strong claim about its importance, status, utility, and reliability—that is, about its value, a point made in the classic work by Polanyi and Prosch (1975).

How do we discern the values dimension of an issue or a decision? What vocabulary do we need for capturing values and crafting decisions that appropriately reflect those values? Expanding our understanding of the sources and types of values and their historical evolution in Western philosophy may help.

VALUES: SOURCES AND TYPES

Professions, organizational culture, law, religion, social customs, family, and personal experience communicate important values (see exhibit 17.1). What matters to us comes from the areas of strong influence in our lives. Consider the relative weight we place on these sources of interests and values. Sometimes, when faced with otherwise intractable conflicts among values, we make choices based on what we consider an influential source for values. For example, how should the CEO at Paradise Hills weigh the relative influences of professional, personal, and community values? Should values issuing from one of these sources override the values from the others?

Another related strategy is to recognize that decision makers project various roles and approach decisions on the basis of these roles. Cases present themselves differently depending on the disciplinary "lens" through which we view them. Our roles grow out of our professional, social, and personal identities and entail specific

perspectives or lenses that refract according to the types of values important to a given discipline or role (exhibit 17.2). Consider the following perspectives:

- **Legal:** What does the law require?
- **Scientific:** Is the explanation comprehensive, coherent, and simple?
- **Economic:** Is this distribution of resources the best one available?
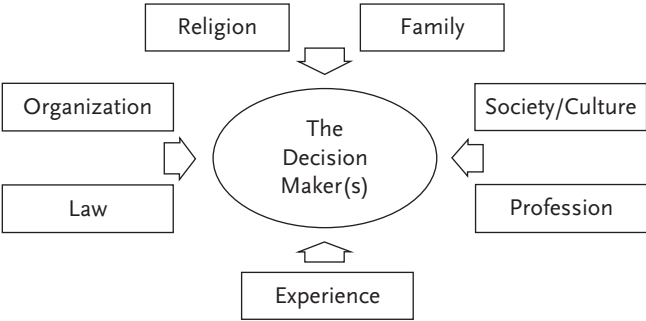

Exhibit 17.1: Sources of Values

Exhibit 17.2: Examples of Values by Type

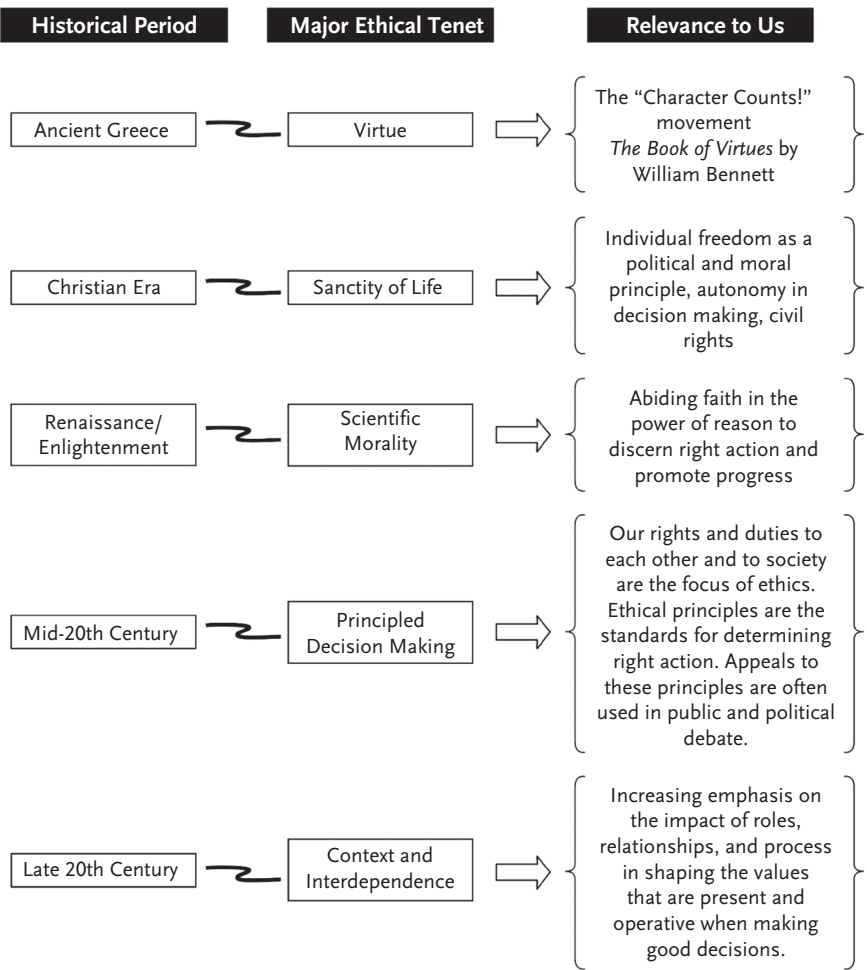| Economic	Context	Scientific
• Profitability • Efficiency • Frugality • Financial Security	We hold values that we use in making decisions. These values come from different sources. We have listed common values by type to assist you in identifying the values that you use in your work to make decisions. These types of values are not exclusive. For example, honesty is a religious value, a moral value, and a scientific value. We incorporate differing types of values to form our own unique set of personal values.	• Accuracy • Objectivity • Honesty • Knowledge

Aesthetic		Legal
• Beauty • Creativity • Simplicity • Elegance		• Justice • Equality • Freedom • Order

Personal	Your Personal Values Related to Work	Social
• Inner Harmony • Competence • Reliability • Happiness		• National Security • Cooperation • Responsibility • Loyalty

Religious	Institutional	Moral
• Charity • Sanctity of Life • Fidelity • Compassion	• Quality • Leadership • Teamwork	• Autonomy • Respect • Trustworthiness • Responsibility • Beneficence • Truth Telling • Integrity • Nonmaleficence • Justice/Fairness

Chapter 17: Deciding Values   261

- **Social:** Does this policy respect the values and traditions of our diverse community?
- **Aesthetic:** Do things fit together and run efficiently and smoothly?
- **Moral:** Is it the right thing to do?

This list is suggestive, not exhaustive, of the ways we unpack, label, and reorganize the variety of interests and values embedded in a single issue or decision.

Finally, history helps. In the United States, our contemporary set of values is a microcosm of more than 2,000 years of history. For example, reviewing the cumulative Western heritage, we see certain markers that signal different approaches to values. This tradition is but one of many cultural and historical strands that contribute to the American tapestry of values (see exhibit 17.3).

Exhibit 17.3: Major Historical Developments in Ethics

Historical Period	Major Ethical Tenet	Relevance to Us
Ancient Greece	Virtue	The "Character Counts!" movement *The Book of Virtues* by William Bennett
Christian Era	Sanctity of Life	Individual freedom as a political and moral principle, autonomy in decision making, civil rights
Renaissance/ Enlightenment	Scientific Morality	Abiding faith in the power of reason to discern right action and promote progress
Mid-20th Century	Principled Decision Making	Our rights and duties to each other and to society are the focus of ethics. Ethical principles are the standards for determining right action. Appeals to these principles are often used in public and political debate.
Late 20th Century	Context and Interdependence	Increasing emphasis on the impact of roles, relationships, and process in shaping the values that are present and operative when making good decisions.

In ancient Greece, virtue mattered most, at least to Plato and Aristotle (compare the Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics "Character Counts!" initiative; see Josephson Institute 2009). The question was "How do I personally cultivate virtuous character traits?"—that is, "Who should I be?" rather than "What should I do?" Plato and Aristotle believed that a morally good person with the right desires, motivations, or intentions is more likely to understand what should be done, more motivated to perform required acts, and more likely to form and act on moral ideals than someone without such virtuous traits.

At the beginning of the Christian era, two fundamental values were added: the sanctity of life and the importance of the individual person. Regardless of faith, the obligation to protect life and the intrinsic worth of persons as autonomous agents are values and imperatives that continue to drive American law and social policy.

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment, science, reason, and moral philosophy joined forces. The scientific values of simplicity, coherence, and comprehensiveness in explanation were extended to other disciplines (e.g., social theory, religion, art). These eras were characterized by a deep faith in the power of reason and the promise of progress, and morality was an important—perhaps the primary—object of rational inquiry. Faith in reason as the guide to right action continues, even (perhaps especially) as we lament its absence.

In the twentieth century, the application of reason to moral values became more systematized, even as it was separated from scientific and "factual" inquiry. Just as science, in one of its dimensions, is systematized explaining, so is moral philosophy (ethics) systematized valuing. One way moral philosophy is systematized is by extracting and abstracting from individual cases—those ever more general and encompassing reasons, standards, and justifications for what constitutes right actions. We call these most general and broadly applicable standards *principles*. This system of analysis and decision making took hold in medical ethics especially.

A principlist approach to valuing and ethics

- identifies the fundamental standards of right conduct, such as autonomy, respect for persons, beneficence, justice, truth telling, and professional responsibility and integrity;
- argues the moral importance of such standards; and
- applies each standard (where necessary) to a given situation.

How we justify these principles and the actions they support is important. Do we look to these standards themselves for self-evident value, or to their consequences? Is there something about respect for persons and telling the truth that is intrinsically valuable, regardless of the circumstances or outcomes? Or should we calculate

the consequences and seek the greatest good for the greatest number of people? The former approach is a formalist approach, the latter utilitarian. They are not mutually exclusive, and both are helpful.

The task, however, is not simply and mechanistically to follow or apply certain principles (e.g., a code of ethics) to a given case, as one might follow a recipe, but rather to see how these standards help us understand and develop the moral dimension of a decision.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, as principlist ethics focused on formulating and impartially applying universally binding moral principles, contemporary philosophers began to observe that universal principles are inadequate for practical guidance—that abstract formulations and hypothetical cases that separate moral agents from the particularities and uniqueness of their individual lives and circumstances (and moral problems from social, historical, and contextual realities) are often less than helpful.

For example, telling the truth is important. Yet sometimes it is not clear what the truth is, or what meanings different "messengers" might communicate, or to what extent quality patient care and safety might be compromised if a program is shut down. Unique circumstances, players, and environment are moving targets to be reckoned with. Context matters.
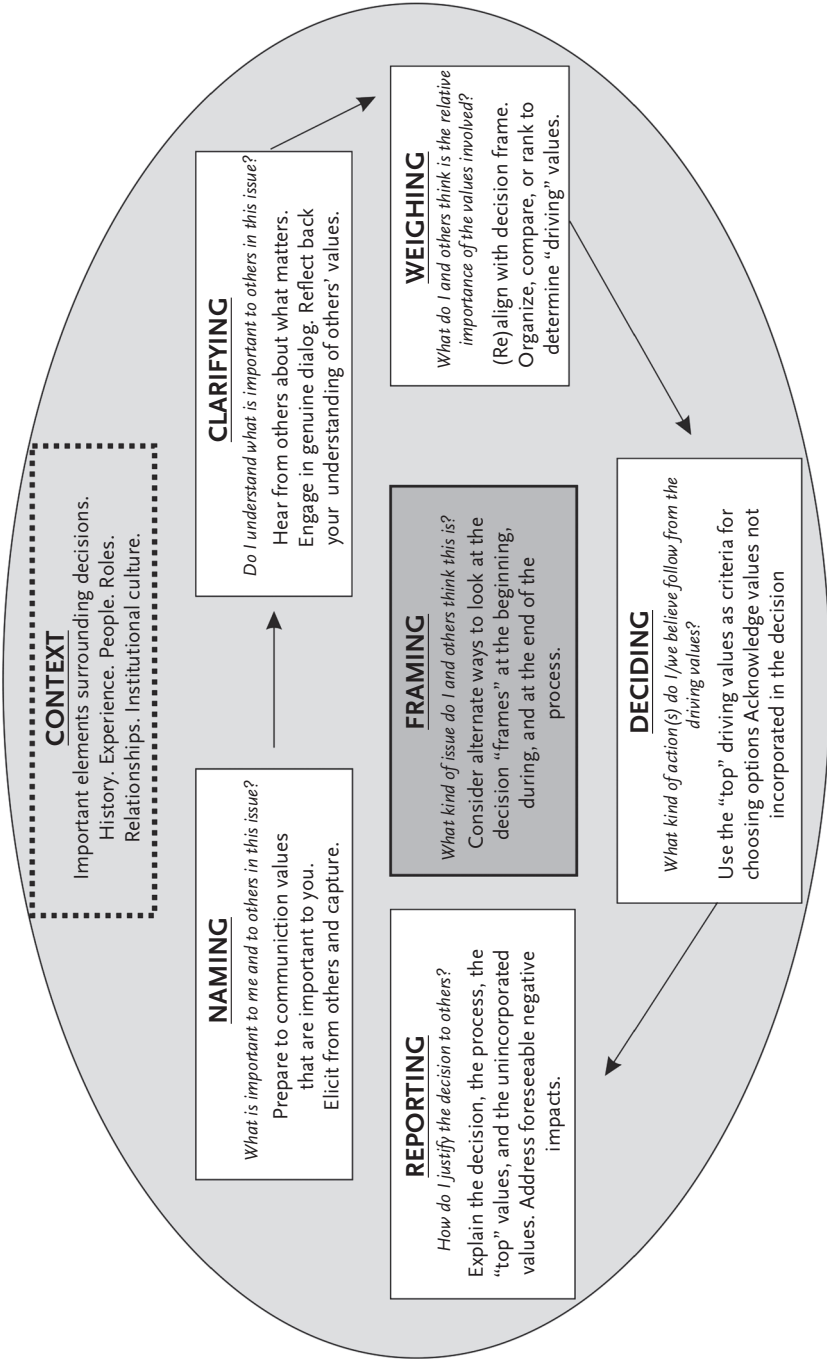
VALUES-BASED DECISION MAKING: A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

A contextual (not to be confused with relativistic) approach to values-based decision making accommodates general principles, uniqueness, and particular details by focusing on roles, relationships, and process. The elliptical diagram in exhibit 17.4 illustrates the approach. Features of the decision-making ellipse include the importance of context; the frames we and others bring to a situation; working with values by naming, clarifying, and weighing them; deciding on the basis of these values; and communicating the decision accurately and thoroughly along with the reasons behind it.

Context

Cases arise and decisions are made in specific contexts. Decision makers must see a case's full context, history, tradition, current conditions, and institutional values, as well as the specific people, roles, and relationships that are at work. They must promote values and argue for their relative weight. Any decision involving Paradise Hills Medical Center must consider its history and role in the community, the current business climate, the institution's role as a teaching hospital, and the

Exhibit 17.4: Decision-Making Ellipse

CONTEXT

Important elements surrounding decisions. History. Experience. People. Roles. Relationships. Institutional culture.

NAMING

What is important to me and to others in this issue?

Prepare to communiction values that are important to you. Elicit from others and capture.

CLARIFYING

Do I understand what is important to others in this issue?

Hear from others about what matters. Engage in genuine dialog. Reflect back your understanding of others' values.

WEIGHING

What do I and others think is the relative importance of the values involved?

(Re)align with decision frame. Organize, compare, or rank to determine "driving" values.

FRAMING

What kind of issue do I and others think this is?

Consider alternate ways to look at the decision "frames" at the beginning, during, and at the end of the process.

DECIDING

What kind of action(s) do I/we believe follow from the driving values?

Use the "top" driving values as criteria for choosing options Acknowledge values not incorporated in the decision

REPORTING

How do I justify the decision to others?

Explain the decision, the process, the "top" values, and the unincorporated values. Address foreseeable negative impacts.

various roles and relationships of the respective players (physicians, CEO, board members, community at large). Effective decision makers understand the influence of context and use it to their advantage.

Framing: What Kind of Issue Do I and Others Think This Is?

Each of us comes to any decision with a first take on what kind of issue is involved. We might initially consider the Paradise Hills case to be an issue of public relations; or perhaps one of liability exposure, institutional survival, or professional fiduciary responsibility; or maybe simply a matter of telling the truth. Different parties bring different initial frames to the decision (see exhibit 17.4). Frames are neither right nor wrong; they simply are. The Talmud (the source from which Jewish law is derived) reminds us that "we see the world not the way it is, but the way we are."

We need ways to simplify and structure all the information "noise" that surrounds us. Our brains are hardwired to use categorical frames to bound what is "in" (relevant, important) and "out" (irrelevant, less important). Frames usually exist outside our awareness and often remain untested and unexamined. Frames are not accessible for problem solving and decision making. Worse yet, they may impede our ability to see root causes of conflict. When frames are understood, appropriate, and flexible, they serve us well in dealing with difficult decisions and challenging situations. When they are hidden, unduly rigid, or based on flawed assumptions, they limit our ability to make wise decisions and may cause us to react to complex situations in an overly simplistic manner.

In decision making, frames determine who should participate; how the decision or question is formulated; what principles, values, and standards are applicable; what information is relevant; what is at stake; what the range of acceptable outcomes is; and how we should treat one another.

The main task of the framing step is to consider alternative ways to define the problem or structure the question, both at the beginning and throughout the decision-making process. Key framing questions include the following:

- What kind of decision is this?
- What assumptions are we making?
- What boundaries are we putting on this question?
- Who are the people involved?

Specific framing activities might include

- periodically stepping back during the decision process and asking if we have the question, issue, or problem framed well;

- consulting with possible stakeholders about ways to frame the issue;
- listing three to five ways to ask the question; and
- soliciting feedback from key people about the best way to approach the problem.

Naming and Clarifying: Do I Understand What Is Important to Me and to Others in This Issue?

The real brainstorming part of the process involves identifying the interests and values held by stakeholders. The goal of this step is to generate a comprehensive list of values described in everyday language, avoiding jargon. Questions that prompt useful values answers include the following:

- What really matters in this issue?
- What is important here that we need to consider?
- What do you think our duties and obligations are in this situation?
- What worries you about this issue?
- When we look back on this decision one year from now, how will we know we did the right thing?
- If your teenager were watching us make this decision and asked why we did it, what would you say to them?

In the Paradise Hills Medical Center case, answers to the question "What is important?" might include (1) that Paradise Hills protect its good reputation; (2) that quality care and patient safety remain paramount; (3) that past, current, and future patients and families be able to trust the healthcare professionals at Paradise Hills; (4) that the hospital enjoy a strong economic position in the local healthcare community; and (5) that physicians honor their fiduciary duties to patients.

As values are named, others need to understand what they mean to the holder. Frequently, our stated values are merely the visible tip of their much larger meaning. Listening well—not merely waiting to speak—is essential. Skills for avoiding "serial monologues" and creating dialogue include

- "reflecting back" one's understanding of someone's stated values;
- avoiding jargon by finding fresh ways to express values; and
- using the services of a facilitator to ensure a full, fair, and productive discussion.

When an individual's position is honored and allowed to take root in open dialogue, the health of the decision-making process is enhanced. Meanings are

clarified, and participants feel they have been heard and may even be willing to let go of certain strong positions that might otherwise impede agreement. Even when full consensus is not possible or is not the goal, comprehensive naming and thorough clarification are necessary for decisions to last.

Weighing: What Do I and Others Think Is the Relative Importance of the Values Involved?

A comprehensive list of interests and values is usually too long to be fully and equally honored. For example, profit, fiduciary responsibility, quality and safety, public reputation, professional autonomy, organizational mission, and increased market share are not entirely compatible. The question thus becomes: If we cannot equally honor all these important interests, which are the most important? Put another way: If we do nothing else, we must make certain that _____ (fill in the value).

Values can be weighed and prioritized in several ways. Sometimes an "advocacy round" helps. Each participant speaks, briefly but strongly, to the value they think is most important. Other techniques include multiple voting, weighted multiple voting, and rank ordering. The rule of thumb is always to use a method that fits the situation. Patterns and agreement begin to emerge, at which point—and only at this point—decision options should be considered.

Deciding: What Kind of Action(s) Do I/We Believe Follow from the Driving Values?

This process is not meant to replace full-blown decision-making processes already in use. Rather, it highlights a dimension of decision making that is routinely overlooked in much decision-making theory and practice: the values base. At the point in any decision-making process where alternative options are generated and considered, each option should immediately be tested against the prioritized list of values. The goal is to develop a decision that is genuinely driven—not just "spun" or superficially rationalized—by the identified top values. The coherence between a decision and its stated reasons must be genuine.

Reporting: How Do I Justify the Decision to Others?

Decision makers may feel that they work through many of the steps described so far as a matter of course and that their decisions are strong and sound for that reason. Chances are, however, that the communication of their decisions and the

reasons behind them leave something to be desired. People who deserve to know should be informed about the grounds for a decision. First, who actually made the decision? This information should not be communicated by leading with, "It was decided that . . ." How was the decision approached, and who was involved? What did the decision makers struggle with? What was most important in making the final decision? Finally, what is the decision?

Some decision makers prefer the "bottom line" approach, starting with the decision and working backward through the justifying reasons. Others prefer a more contextual or narrative approach that concludes with the decision. The components of a complete report are the same, however, and the common goal is to explain and justify the decision to stakeholders. Consider the two following Decision Summary Forms.

Form 1:

State the decision in direct, simple language. Be clear about who owns the decision.

(I/the executive committee have decided to _____.)

Describe the most important values that drove the decision.

(Ultimately, we believe that _____ and _____ had to drive our final choice.)

Directly address the downside of the decision—that is, what you do not like about it.

(There are some parts of this decision I do not like, such as _____.)

Describe applicable values that could not be honored, and indicate the reasoning behind your judgment that other values were more important in this situation. Address any negative effects of the decision on stakeholders. Pay particular attention to those who were not fully consulted in the decision process.

Form 2:

Describe how you approached the decision. Provide some brief highlights of the decision process—what steps you took, who was at the table, whom you consulted, and what level of time and effort was involved.

(Let me give you a sense of the road we took to get to this decision:_____.)

Be candid about the downside of the decision.

Describe applicable values that could not be honored. Address the negative effects of the decision on the stakeholder.

Describe (using everyday language) the values that drove the decision.
State the decision in direct, simple language. Be clear about who owns the decision.

CONCLUSION

Decisions made with integrity are comprehensive, coherent, and transparent (see exhibit 17.5). First, the decision maker has made a good-faith effort to consider the full range of interests and values (comprehensive). Second, the decision is logically grounded in the values considered to be the driving values—that is, the stated basis for the decision genuinely supports the decision (coherent). Third, the decision maker communicates the decision to those who deserve to hear it in a sincere, forthright manner. The decision maker is willing to stand up and be open and accountable to stakeholders by exposing the reasoning for the decision. Doing so requires a willingness to be tested, questioned, and judged by others (transparent).

This values-based decision-making process rests on certain important assumptions, observations, and hypotheses. All choices and decisions are driven by values—by what matters. Contemporary business approaches to ethics and integrity often focus on avoiding wrongdoing or lawbreaking. Many decisions, however, are not about right versus wrong but rather right versus right (competing "goods"). Decisions are effective and enduring when they are based on clearly identified values, are made efficiently, have the resources and support to be fully implemented, and produce positive results that significantly outweigh the negatives. Durable decisions usually follow thorough dialogue, consultation, and collaboration.

Exhibit 17.5: Triangle Representing Decisions Made with Integrity

COMPREHENSIVE   COHERENT

TRANSPARENT
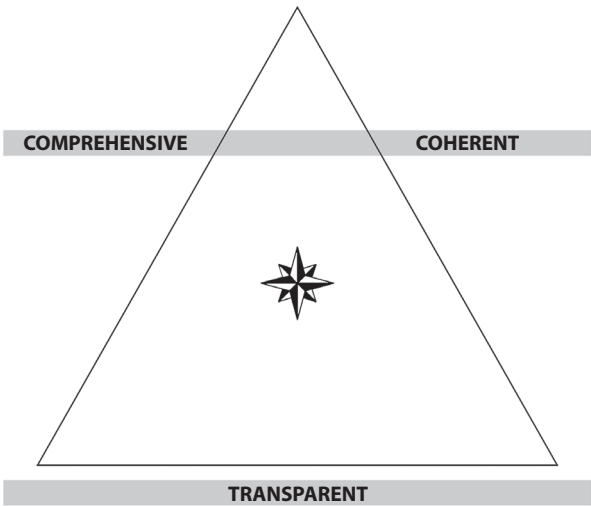
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POSTSCRIPT

The following tool is useful for a "values analysis on the fly"—when time is short but values still must be considered.

1. *Come prepared to speak directly to the values dimension of the decision.*
    - If you know the issue ahead of time, ascertain what frame you bring and what values you think are most important, and be prepared to communicate them.
    - Encourage others to think ahead of time about their frames and values.
    - Create the expectation that this kind of "homework" will be done.
2. *Commit to an advocacy round.*
    - Ask everyone in the room to explain their frame and values.
    - Avoid jargon and encourage ordinary language that captures the values in context.
    - Listen well and check in with people as they explain their values.
    - Record the frames and values where everyone can see and refer to them.
    - Weigh these values for relative importance.
3. *Return to the values list as appropriate.*
    - As issues and options are explored, consider which values each choice honors.
    - Craft decisions that are genuinely driven by the values that are most important in the situation.
4. *Report your values-based decision.*
    - State the decision and name the values that drove it.
    - Acknowledge the values that could not be honored.
    - Explain values priorities.

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