

May 2021 Newsletter from ERiA

Spring Greetings, friends and colleagues of Ethical Reasoning in Action!

Below are updates and stories from ERiA that you may find encouraging in the midst of these challenging times. The newsletter is intended to bring attention to the good teaching, scholarship, and work being done at JMU and elsewhere. Exceptionally difficult ethical situations are being navigated all over the world. How can the 8KQ help us perceive the ethical issues at stake more clearly and make the important decisions that we face more ethically?

In what follows read about:

Do nonprofit organizations face ethical problems? Nearly every day
Dr. Linda Plitt Donaldson

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Dr. Doug Hochstetler

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Dr. Linda Plitt Donaldson – Do Nonprofit Organizations Face Ethical Problems? Nearly Everyday



Nonprofit organizations have a reputation for advancing public welfare and partnering with government in addressing pressing social needs. We often assume that they are good moral agents in society. The reality is that on a daily basis nonprofit leaders and staff face challenging ethical situations. Their actions can significantly impact the people and communities they serve – as well as the organization itself. Over the years, nonprofit agencies have been associated with significant ethical violations. One explosive example is the 1992 scandal at the United Way of America that found its long-time CEO, William Aramony, guilty of fraud and financial mismanagement.

JMU students in the spring 2021 Nonprofit Capstone course used the 8 Key Questions as a framework to analyze their Capstone project and as a strategy for ethical decision-making. The Capstone involves a significant project within a nonprofit setting that has the potential to bring about a positive social impact. Students took turns applying the 8 key questions to their Capstone project to deepen their ethical analysis. Peers provided feedback. They thoughtfully considered various ethical dilemmas either posed by or emerging from their Capstone project and included these insights into an ethics paper as well as a section of their final capstone paper. Some of the questions explored included:

- What are the most ethical responses to questions of distributive justice in an environment of scarce resources often experienced in nonprofit settings?
- How do we create nonprofit succession planning processes that are fair and result in inclusive and diverse candidate pools?
- What marketing and fundraising strategies should nonprofit agencies use in developing countries to support and advance the dignity and worth of the recipients of their services?
- How does a mobile health clinic address some of the ethical considerations associated with health care disparities in the Appalachian region?
- How do the 8 Key Questions address a communications campaign focusing on “Not In My Back Yard”ism (NIMBYism) in Harrisonburg with its limited supply of affordable housing available to people with moderate household incomes?

Students noted the importance of applying the 8 Key Questions to their Capstone project. Several mentioned that reintroducing this framework in this class raised their awareness of the everyday occurrence of ethical dilemmas in nonprofit settings. They also expressed appreciation for having an ethical decision-making strategy when considering these situations.

Dr. Doug Hochstetler – Gender Equity, Pay to Play, PEDs: Are There Ethical Issues in Sports and Physical Education?



In KIN 304: History and philosophy of physical education and sport, we examine current ethical issues related to sport, drawing from the 8KQ for class discussion as well as using the 8KQ when writing a formal position paper. Students read about the 8KQ and spend time in class discussing how the questions might provide clarity and guidance around two specific contemporary issues:

- “digital doping” in sports like cycling where participants may cheat while engaged in virtual races equipped with apps such as Zwift or Strava; and
- American football and the rising concerns around “amateurism” and violence.

Students took part in this class discussion, both in small groups as well as with the entire class. Each student selected a pressing ethical issue and wrote a position paper both describing the current situation as well as advocating for a particular position. To inform their papers, students incorporated at least 4 of the 8KQ to help provide clarity and overall rationale. Student papers included a wide range of topics including: gender equity for women’s sports, the pay-to-play status of youth soccer, athletes’ rights when it comes to speaking out on social and political issues, performance enhancing drug use, the rights of transgender athletes, and sports betting.

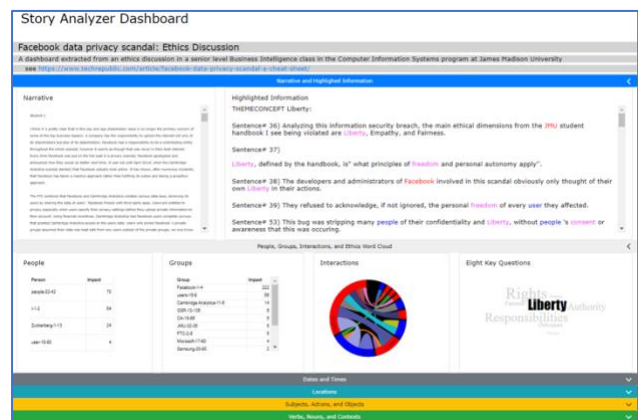
Dr. Michel Mitri – Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Reasoning: Introducing a “Story Analyzer” for Ethical Reasoning



In CIS 463 Business Intelligence, a senior-level course in Computer Information Systems, students did an ethical reasoning exercise involving artificial intelligence technology and concerns. This process involved use of an app I developed called [Story Analyzer](#). The app uses natural language processing to capture main elements of textual narratives and produces interactive dashboards as a result.

For this exercise, students read a [TechRepublic article](#) about the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal and applied 8KQ to their analysis. I also provided Story Analyzer dashboards of this article: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) to which students contributed discussion posts. I used Story Analyzer to capture this discussion into another dashboard, shown [here](#). Note the ethics word cloud in the second section, which captures sentences where the 8KQ terms (and related terms) are found in the students’ posts. Other visualizations of dashboards depict the main characters of the story, their interactions, the locations and times of events, and other contextual features. The many thoughtful student answers can be seen in in the [dashboard of their discussion](#).

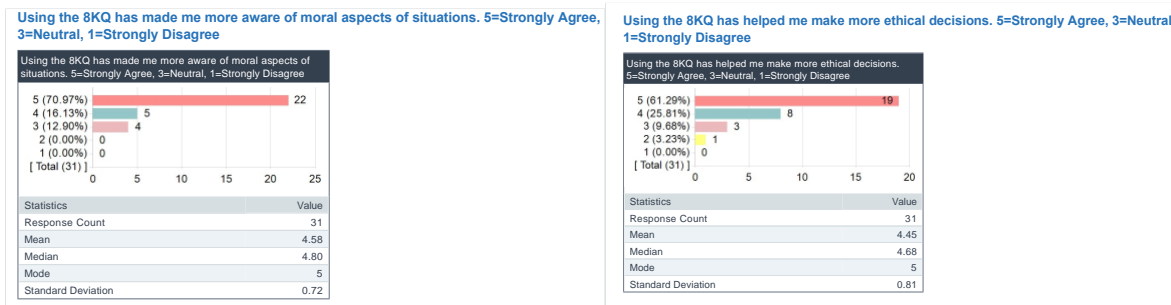
I have found the Story Analyzer to be a useful tool for instruction and I hope that folks will see its potential applications in their own work. I look forward to collaborating with colleagues who wish to explore possibilities.



Dr. Christian Early – Does Using the 8KQ Change Moral Perception? Noticing the Moral Complexities of Everyday Life

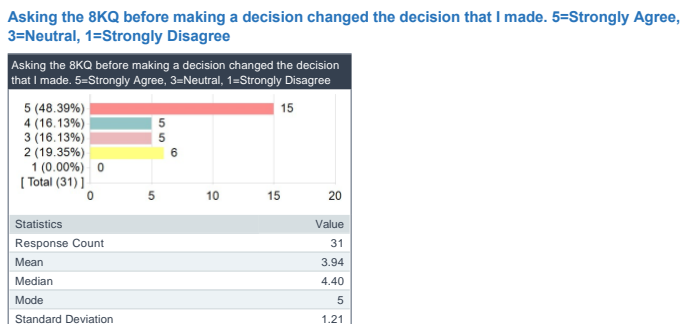
In PHIL150 Ethical Reasoning, students are asked to enter each week of the semester with the 8KQ in mind. If a situation arises in which they face a decision that has a moral quality to it, defined as one or more of the 8KQ apply, they submit a brief and non-identifying sketch of it. Students tell me at the beginning of the semester that they are doubtful that they will encounter any moral situations during the week. Their lives are, morally speaking, uneventful – or so they claim. About half-way into the semester, students begin to express their surprise at a remarkable discovery: the moral complexity of everyday life. Students face situations from end-of-life matters to issues with roommates and everything in between. One student said this: “This week I was put in yet another moral situation. ([U]nrelated, but it is cool to see that since being in your class, I’ve noticed more and more moral moments in my daily life that I would’ve usually just shrugged off and not deeply thought about).”

Statements such as these prompted my curiosity concerning whether using the 8KQ habitually on a weekly basis could be changing the moral perception of lived experience. I decided to put my hunch to the test by asking students directly about their experience using the 8KQ on their evaluations and whether it helped them make a more ethical decision. Here are the results:



Notice that 27 students out of 31 (87%) responding either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that using the 8KQ not only made them more aware of moral aspects of situations but also that the same number of students found them to be helpful in making a more ethical decision.

Wondering, finally, whether using the 8KQ actually changed a decision or whether using the strategy simply re-affirmed an already-made decision based on gut instinct, students reported this:



As one might expect, fewer students reported that using the 8KQ changed a decision. Notice, however, that 20 students out of 31 (65%) either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that it *did* change a decision. Not only does using the 8KQ in everyday life change our perception of situations that arise, but as a decision-making strategy, it also helps us to live our lives more ethically.

PUBLICATIONS

Dr. Laura Leduc – [Is Ethical Reasoning Training Effective?](#)



Research on the effectiveness of ethical training programs yields very mixed results — some training programs seem to be somewhat effective, but many seem to have no effect. Although results were modest, we found that the 8KQ ethical training program had a positive impact. Students who reported more exposure to 8KQ training also responded more ethically to a series of ethical decision-making scenarios. So, why does our training work?

First, we know from meta-analytic studies that multiple shorter exposures to ethical training works better than one long training. The 8KQ are effective in part because students are exposed to them multiple times, across different situations within and outside the classroom. Second, we know that scenario-based instruction is better than lectures. Because the 8KQ are designed for application – the whole point is to apply them to various situations – they are more impactful as a tool for ethical training. Third, the common framework provides a shared language and consistency of application required for skill development. There are SO many ways to approach teaching ethics. If students are exposed to the topic multiple times, but the overall effect is to think the field is disjointed and disconnected, it can be easy to dismiss the topic altogether. The common framework across learning situations is part of what makes the 8KQ powerful as a learning tool.

Finally, the 8KQ encourage students to reflect. Many of our students have been raised in an era of standardized tests. They want to know what the one right answer is, they want to memorize that answer for the test, and they want to move on. Yet the world is far more complex than this, and ethical dilemmas are dilemmas because there is not one right answer – or because the right answer comes at a personal cost. In teaching our students how to reflect on the ethical dimensions and possible options for action, we are teaching them how to wade through that quagmire, over and over, and to find the best path forward. We are preparing them to be enlightened citizens and what we do makes a difference!

William Hawk, Frederick Spielberg, Everett Ressler, and Pilar Aguilar – [Ethical Considerations in Deciding When to Re-open Schools: International Perspectives](#)

In the midst of a global pandemic, policy makers in the education sector face a complex dilemma regarding the reopening of schools, closed around the world as an initial public health measure. The authors propose using the Eight Key Questions ethical strategy to clarify the issues involved in decision-making. While every context is unique, the adoption of this investigative process and ethical litmus test may help clarify the trade-offs in health, education, protection, social services, economic productivity and the best interests of the child.



S. Jeanne Horst, Caroline O. Prendergast, Christine Robinson, William J. Hawk – [Ask Eight Key Ethical Questions: A Strategy for Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Values into Assessment Planning](#)



Higher education assessment reflects values through choices of measures, strategies, samples, and analyses. Conventional practices can (intentionally or unintentionally) perpetuate racist or culturally exclusive values or unjust biases. Using assessment to support diversity, equity, and inclusion presents a grand challenge to assessment professionals today and will require broad and collective cooperation among members of the assessment and higher education community. To meet the daunting challenges, authors propose

assessment professionals use the Eight Key Questions ethical reasoning strategy when adopting more culturally responsive and socially just assessment practices.

Contact Ethical Reasoning in Action

How are **you** using the 8KQ in your classes, programs, work, research, professional and daily life? Hearing your stories and, with your permission, reading them in an upcoming ERIa newsletter helps to nurture the JMU academic community into a culture where ethical reasoning flourishes! Send your experiences, ideas, and insights to ethicalreasoning@jmu.edu.



Ethical Reasoning in Action
James Madison University

The Eight Key Questions

What key questions should I (we) use to evaluate the ethical dimensions of a situation?

Fairness	How can I (we) act justly, equitably, balancing interests?
Outcomes	What possible actions achieve the best short- and long-term outcomes?
Responsibilities	What duties and/or obligations apply?
Character	What actions help me (us) become my (our) ideal?
Liberty	How do I (we) show respect for personal freedom, autonomy, consent?
Empathy	How would I (we) act if I (we) cared about all involved?
Authority	What do legitimate authorities (e.g. experts, laws, god/s) expect?
Rights	What rights, if any (e.g., innate, legal, social) apply?

Use the "FORCLEAR" acronym to help you remember all 8KQ.

Learn more at [jmu.edu/ethicalreasoning](http://www.jmu.edu/ethicalreasoning)

This biodegradable card was printed using recycled PVC.

ASK FORCLEAR
<http://www.jmu.edu/ethicalreasoning/>