



On the horns of a dilemma

Which horn of the charging bull would you prefer to stab you? That is the question when you have a dilemma. There is no elegant way out, all alternatives have serious drawbacks. Nevertheless you have to choose. In this choice your values and principles are in conflict. You will have to make a decision: which principle weighs heaviest.

The dialogue about moral dilemmas has originally been developed so as to strengthen integrity and moral competency, for the management of organisations and in public management. Awareness of moral questions and the skill to handle them is not obvious. There are different possibilities for strengthening the integrity of an organisation. One is to draw up codes of conduct. Another is to get interested parties to become involved in conducting dialogues about moral questions as part of their professional responsibilities. The dilemma dialogue is aimed at that. (see practical guide 23, Behind your firm beliefs)

Approach

1. One of the participants proposes a dilemma. It can be a general one or in the form of a specific case, a practical situation in which you were or currently are involved.
2. Be careful! Not every moral consideration is a dilemma. When the agent of a person selling a house talks to a potential buyer about the house for sale, he has to decide what to tell and what not, but that does not mean he is facing a dilemma. A dilemma has the structure: "In situation X I can choose act A – and that has drawback M – or choose act B – and that has drawback N". Formulate M and N as the violation of a principle, for example in a medical dilemma: "Then I am infringing on the patient's right of self determination".
3. Test the formulation of the dilemma on a concrete example: what exactly is the dilemma? What is the act which is the crux of the matter? What are the options between which one has to choose? What weighty drawbacks attach to them?
4. Make an illustration of the dilemma on a large page or whiteboard in the form of the two horns of the bull:
 - a. draw the situation and the choice;
 - b. draw the alternative acts A and B;
 - c. give the arguments for each alternative, separated into pro's and cons;
 - d. name the underlying principles or values for each argument: what pleads for it that the pro or the con arguments should be given most weight?
5. Concentrate on the underlying values. Which values support each other? Which oppose each other?
6. What finally is the decision to be made in the dilemma? It is between ... and Try to be as precise as possible.





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7. If you have to choose right now, what would your deliberation be like?
8. Formulate a sentence with the following structure: "In situation X I choose act A, because for me finally value M has the final say, although by doing so value N suffers."
9. For the person who introduced the dilemma: Are you prepared to stand by the outcome in public? Does the outcome fit your idea of what integrity is?
10. For all: Which arguments and values were thoroughly investigated? Which ones deserve closer investigation?

