(C) CHARACTER

YOUR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE:

You tend to base your ethical perspective on what it is good to be, rather than what it is good to do. You believe that ethics should focus on ways to help people achieve moral excellence. When asked to judge whether an individual’s actions are ethical, you look beyond the actions to examine the individual’s character. Uprightness and integrity are key factors in your assessment. You look for evidence of virtue in people, including such traits as honor, justice, and benevolence, believing that a virtue is not just an abstract principle. Rather virtue is reflected in the quality of an individual’s character, and character is more important than an individual’s actions. In your opinion, mere compliance with rules, no matter how well-intentioned, does not make anyone an ethical person without being accompanied by consistent voluntary striving to be a morally good person. This category is most closely aligned in philosophy with virtue theory (See Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre).

YOUR ETHICAL STYLE:

You believe that ethics relies on the ability of individuals to make sound moral judgments. You do not believe that it is enough to comply with some preset standards or principles of right and wrong to find the solution to a complex ethical dilemma. Ethics relies on exemplary character to make the difficult choices. You value such qualities as honesty, wisdom, and integrity, and you place greater emphasis on demonstrating these qualities than on following the rules. You believe that an individual would be incapable of choosing between conflicting rules or standards of right and wrong without already possessing good character. Your approach to ethics calls for developing practical wisdom and sound judgment within individuals to guide them in their ethical decision making. Your ethical style compels you to strive to be a person of wisdom and integrity.

FRUSTRATIONS YOU FACE IN ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS:

- Because social inequalities exist in our society, not everyone has an equal opportunity to develop the virtues you value so highly. In ethical discussions, you may be frustrated as you begin to realize that not all people have similar values.

- You believe that development of character within individuals is a slow and deliberate process that has been neglected in recent years. This kind of ideal goal is not compatible with the tendency for some people to look for “quick fixes” for problems.

- Although you strongly believe that mere compliance with organizational rules is not sufficient to develop ethical character within individuals, you may work for an organization that relies heavily on some system of ethical rules and sanctions. You view this as an “artificial” ethical environment that is less than sincere.

- You are frustrated when ethical considerations appear to be tacked on to the “real business” of organizational decision making—almost as an afterthought. You believe that this disregard for ethics is a negative reflection on the character of the decision makers.

- The people you work with may not have had the benefit of appropriate moral guidance throughout their lives, and they may not understand your perspective.

- The word “integrity” is used by many in ethical discussions, but modeled by few.
(O) OBLIGATION

YOUR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE:

You tend to base your ethical perspective on an individual’s duty or obligation to do what is morally right—principles that represent what rational persons ought morally to do. You believe that ethical conduct appeals to “conscience.” In judging whether a person’s actions are ethical, you look to the intent behind his/her actions, rather than focusing on results. In other words, to be considered ethical, you believe that we must choose how we act and what rules we are willing to follow. From your perspective, ethical principles must be: (a) appropriate under any circumstances (universalizable); (b) respectful of human dignity; and (c) committed to promoting individual freedom and autonomy. Human beings must never be treated simply as “means” to the accomplishment of some defined “end.” The end does not justify the means. This category is most closely aligned in philosophy with a deontological theory (See Immanuel Kant and John Rawls).

YOUR ETHICAL STYLE:

You believe that human beings have intrinsic value—we have a right to individual respect. Therefore, you cannot support social traditions and policies aimed at “the best interests of society as a whole” if any individual is denied the opportunities to which she/he is entitled as a human being. Your approach to ethics requires that, within legal and humane limits, people should be allowed to make their own choices. Acting in response to impulse, instinct, or rules worked out by others for us to obey does not constitute ethical conduct on our part. You believe that fostering personal growth takes precedence over achieving efficiency through organizational and social structures that tend to “dehumanize” ethical decision making. For this reason, you advocate policies intended to ensure equal respect and opportunities for all. Moral decisions must reflect the free choice of individuals if we ever expect to hold them personally responsible. You are guided by a desire to be in accord with established standards of right and wrong.

FRUSTRATIONS YOU FACE IN ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS:

- What you determine to be the right choice may not appear to be the most beneficial choice, in the short-run, for the organization you have agreed to support. The right choice does not necessarily benefit the decision maker.

- You believe that cost-benefit analysis (weighing the cost versus benefit of a specific decision) is inappropriate for addressing issues with ethical considerations, even though this is the preferred decision-making tool for many organizations. For example, some of the things that you hold most dear are not easily measured, e.g., right and wrong; good and evil; and the value of a human life.

- Your belief that we have a moral duty or obligation to do what is right leaves little room for compromise when ethical principles are being violated.

- You are frustrated to discover how various individuals define right and wrong, how conflicts are sometimes resolved in an organizational setting, and who resolves them.

- The people you work with may argue that certain factions of society are not capable of acting in their own best interests. You consider this a faulty argument that was once used to deny equitable treatment to women and minorities.

- Defending your ethical perspective may result in economic hardship, e.g., a lost promotion or termination.
(R) RESULTS

YOUR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE:

You tend to base your ethical perspective on the results or consequences of your actions. You believe that conduct should be directed toward promoting the greatest good for the greatest number of persons. In judging whether an individual’s actions are ethical, you look for concrete evidence. It is not enough for an individual to “talk the talk.” Results are needed to indicate that she/he is “walking the walk.” In your opinion, what really counts in reaching an ethical decision is the “bottom line.” Discussions about process and principles are not as important as what is ultimately achieved for the overall good of society. The goal of ethics is to achieve the greatest possible good for society as a whole. This category is most closely aligned in philosophy with a utilitarian theory of ethics (See Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill).

YOUR ETHICAL STYLE:

You believe that we each have a moral right to experience the “good life.” One way to measure how good life really is would be to determine how satisfied the majority of the people in our society seem to be. If most people are unhappy, something is morally wrong and needs to be fixed. Therefore, your approach to ethics is likely to focus on what could be done to improve the well being of the greatest number of persons. One approach might be to develop rules of ethical conduct for people to follow, along with corresponding sanctions, in order to achieve what is best for society as a whole. Another quite different approach might be to improve overall satisfaction by creating a more pleasant environment in which people enjoy learning and working together for the betterment of society. With either approach, your ethical style demands that you achieve measurable results.

FRUSTRATIONS YOU FACE IN ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS:

- The inability to adequately measure the far-reaching impacts of an ethical decision may compel you to focus your decision making on the immediate scope of the problem, thereby creating conflicts with those who are not results-oriented.
- You are frustrated by the wide variety of competing views regarding what is good for society as a whole and by the process used to determine whose view ultimately prevails.
- In attempting to maximize the general good, you will, at some point, need to decide whether your goal is to improve the total benefit to society as a whole (the aggregate) or the total benefit per person within society (the average). This definition will have a direct impact on your approach to ethical decision making.
- People who cling to the idealistic notion of protecting the interests of some minority of the population may stand in the way of achieving the good life for the majority.
- People you work with may not share your ethical approach, thereby interfering with your ability to achieve the desired results.
- What is best for the greater good of society may not be best for you.
YOUR ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE:

You tend to base your perspective on ethics on a concern for the instability of knowledge, the uncertainty of human judgment, and the lack of individuals who can truly qualify as experts in the discernment of what is right and what is wrong. Education does not provide all the answers. In your view, pragmatism, practical day-to-day experience, is the only reasonable guide to action. In judging whether an individual’s actions are ethical, you stress the practical consequences of his/her actions as the essential criteria for evaluating each case. Your distrust of any attempt to define universal principles and moral values is based, in part, on a distrust of the motives of the individuals involved. You believe that no principled solution is adequate for all time. As long as decision makers continue to disregard the cultures and lives of minorities, any discussion that suggests a unity of belief is absurd. This category is most closely aligned in philosophy with a postmodern theory of ethics (See Michel Foucault and David Harvey).

YOUR ETHICAL STYLE:

You believe that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong. With new knowledge and different circumstances, an individual’s beliefs and values may change periodically. Therefore, your approach to ethics generally tends to challenge all attempts to plan ideal social orders rationally. You tend to distrust institutionalized codes of ethics. The correct choice for a particular situation and a particular time is likely to evolve from a consideration of alternative viewpoints. You reject the use of power or control to suppress opposition to some “accepted” perspective, embracing broad representation in ethical decision making. Your ethical style requires a critical analysis of the far-reaching impact of each alternative, not a predetermined response to what appears to be “good” in the short-run.

FRUSTRATIONS YOU FACE IN ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS:

- Your commitment to frequent reconsideration of a wide variety of differing alternative viewpoints is unsettling to others who seek a sense of security in believing that they have made the “right” decision.

- It is difficult, expensive and time-consuming to adequately analyze the far-reaching impact of an ethical decision. Extensive public input and debate is essential to the development of policy that supports tolerance and respect for diversity.

- In periods of crisis or chaos within your organization, short-term benefits and image frequently triumph over ethics as the primary concern.

- People you work with may not acknowledge the complexity of the world as you see it and will tend instead toward recommending highly simplified “solutions” that appear to be little more than window dressing.

- Without the structure provided by established standards of right and wrong, it is sometimes difficult to justify your ethical decisions to others. Consensus becomes an arduous task.

- In today’s society, you are frustrated that those with the most power are attempting to define what is important to individuals under their control.
BLENDED CATEGORIES

It is possible to have ethical beliefs that are represented in more than one category. Most individuals agree with at least some characteristics in all four categories, and the relationship between these categories form your unique ethical style. Therefore, these categories should be viewed as broad descriptions of typical patterns. The purpose of the ETHICS AWARENESS INVENTORY© is to strengthen your understanding of your own belief system. The idea of blended categories takes your AWARENESS a step further.

If your second largest positive score is within one or two points of your largest, you first will want to take a look at the compatibility of the two scores. You may want to consider whether (a) you are experiencing an internal conflict in attempting to function in two distinguishable moral realms, or (b) your ethical style is simply a unique blend of two categories. For example, an individual whose largest combined scores are C and O (within one or two points of each other) is likely to support the idea that ethical principles without goodness are powerless and goodness without some standards or principles of right and wrong is ineffective. The two categories can be supportive of one another. However, an individual whose high categories are O and R may be experiencing some internal conflicts between his/her own feeling of moral obligation to individuals, on the one hand, while attempting to produce specific results for some group or organization on the other. A careful examination of these blended categories to identify possible internal conflicts is recommended.

Secondly, you may want to consider whether you are being challenged by situations in which people are asking you to do things that conflict with your personal ethical beliefs. You may feel pressured in some situations to reject your own standards of right and wrong, causing a feeling of internal conflict. In completing this ETHICS AWARENESS INVENTORY©, you were instructed to answer the questions in accordance with your personal ethical beliefs. However, it is possible that your personal belief system is being challenged by others asking you to set aside your principles in order to be accepted in certain circumstances. Until you are able to explain your sincere beliefs and consistently act in accordance with those beliefs without compromise, you will continue to experience internal moral conflict. This will create discomfort for you, and it will be difficult to make ethical decisions that you can stand behind.

Keep in mind that these descriptive categories represent only four recognized categories of ethical philosophy and theory. Other schools of thought may be more closely related to your ethical belief system. However, these common descriptions should provide insight into some of the significant differences of opinion that may arise when you are trying to reach an ethical decision, especially when working with others. A better understanding of the conflicts that arise between you and others regarding what is the right thing to do will be helpful. Hopefully, the ETHICS AWARENESS INVENTORY© will encourage you to explore other resources and try to understand different ethical styles. AWARENESS of your ethical perspective is the first step toward making ethics a central part of your daily life and developing a better working relationship with others.