Applying Kidder’s Ethical Decision-Making Checklist to Media Ethics

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Introduction, Patricia Ferrier

In this article, the author uses a model of decision-making to show journalists how using a checklist can make it easier to decide how to decide what to do when faced with making ethical choices.

The Kidder model, revised by the author for media ethics cases, uses checkpoints at which journalists should stop and determine appropriate actions. When faced with a decision, journalists should first recognize whether the decision involves a moral issue, to recognize whether the decision does, in fact, involve an ethics question. Journalists should ask whether the question involves deception, fairness, conflicts of interest, privacy, poor taste, etc. Deciding whether one of those issues exists is the first step in recognizing that we are going to have to make a moral judgment.

Next, the journalist should decide whose responsibility the decision is. Is it my decision, as a journalist, to make or does someone else have the responsibility for this? If it is our decision, we must next gather all of the facts we need for a decision. If we don’t have all of the information, how can we possibly expect to make a good decision?

Once we have the facts, we should check to see whether the issue is right or wrong. This is a way for us to determine whether we are, in fact, deciding an ethical dilemma or a moral temptation. Right-or-wrong decisions are moral temptations that don’t require analysis because, the author says, they’re clearly wrong.

Right-or-wrong paradigms allow us to weigh truth vs. loyalty, individual vs. community, short-term vs. long-term, and justice vs. mercy. These, the author writes, are the classic tensions in ethics, the points that make us wonder what our choices should be.

Throughout the model, the emphasis is on thinking and reasoning out what to do, instead of reacting emotionally or impulsively. The final steps in the model emphasize this: make the decision, justify it, then reflect on the decision some more.

Using actual cases, the author takes the reader step by step through deciding whether to publish the graphic photo of a woman covered with the
blood of her son, who had been killed by a car. Instinctively, we might say “publish” or “don’t publish,” based on our immediate reactions. The Kidder model forces us to go beyond that and think about what we are doing and why we are doing it.

As you read this article, keep in mind an ethical dilemma you might face as a journalist. Does the Kidder model provide any guidance for you? Once you work through the model, would your decision in your earlier dilemma be the same if you had to make it again? What would be different? Were you as able then to justify your decision as you might be with the Kidder model?

A substantial library of mass communications ethics texts is now available, from which has emerged a canon of philosophical approaches to ethical decision making in this field. This canon includes, for example, Kant’s Categorical Imperative, Aristotle’s Golden Mean, Judeo-Christian ethics, Mill’s Principle of Utility, Rawls’s Veil of Ignorance, and Ross’s Prima Facie Duties. Some communications, literature also includes specific decision-making models and checklists such as the Potter Box (Christians, Fackler, & Rotzoll, 1995), Sissela Bok’s model for ethical decision making in general (Patterson & Wilkins, 1994,) and for deception, in specific (Bok, 1989), the Poynter Institute checklist of questions to make good ethical decisions (Black & Bryant, 1995), Deni Elliott’s guidelines for ethical reflection (Patterson & Wilkins, 1994), and the issue-specific checklists (for privacy, deception, diversity, etc.) developed by Black, Steele, and Barney (1995) in Doing Ethics in Journalism. Each of these theories and checklists allows students and practitioners a different approach or window by which to consider the multiple aspects of an ethical dilemma, and by which to arrive at an ethical course of action.

In his book How Good People Make Tough Choices, journalist Rushworth Kidder (1995) presented a list of checkpoints for ethical decision making that should be considered by media ethics instructors for inclusion in this canon. Kidder’s checklist can serve as an organizing framework by which students sequence the decision-making process, clarify values and issues, increase awareness of the morally relevant issues, make a decision about an

ethical course of action in a case, and justify it. Kidder’s checklist is broad enough to encompass and overarch the current canon, while making significant unique contributions to moral deliberation in media ethics.

This article presents Kidder’s decision-making framework within the media ethics context. The discussion is divided into three parts. First, it summarizes Kidder’s model and comments on the merits of each checkpoint. The discussion relates Kidder’s approach to others in the media ethics canon. Second, revisions to the model are proposed for moral reasoning about media ethics cases. Finally, the revised Kidder model is applied to four media ethics cases, with each case highlighting the strength of a particular step in the model.

**Kidder’s Ethical Decision-Making Model**

Kidder’s model for ethical decision making is summarized below, discussing nine checkpoints in a progression toward a decision.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #1: Recognize there is a moral issue**

Kidder’s first step acknowledges the need to identify the moral dimensions of an issue, practice, or case under consideration. One of the challenges in teaching ethics is to help students become sensitive to the ethical dimensions of a situation and to recognize an ethical problem when they see one. Rest (Rest & Narvaez, 1994) suggested that moral judgment or decision making follows successfully only after one has developed moral sensitivity. The first step in Elliott’s decision making framework is also to identify the “morally relevant factors of the case” (Patterson & Wilkins, 1994, p. 17). Before moving to resolve specific cases, students should develop proficiency in recognizing the nuances and dimensions of ethical problems when they present themselves.

The primary strength of Kidder’s model, beginning with this first step, is in the development of moral discernment. The questions suggested and the considerations required by Kidder’s model heighten sensitivity to the impact on a moral issue of factual details and context, the conflicting values inherent in moral dilemmas, the options and alternatives available to moral actors, and the merits of various options. In increasing sensitivity to and awareness of relevant moral issues and nuances, Kidder’s approach leads to clearer and more focused thinking in the application of resolution principles, and therefore ultimately to better decision outcomes.
Kidder’s Checkpoint #1 requires a careful look at the case at hand to determine if there is a moral issue with which to grapple and about which to make a decision. Within the context of media ethics, the literature suggests that some of the core moral issues that should alert students about underlying ethical concerns include: deception and misrepresentation; lack of fairness; disloyalty; conflicts of interest; careerism (including greed and self-interest); sensationalism; violence or threats of harm; pornography; poor taste; invasions of privacy; misappropriation of intellectual and creative property; inappropriate resource allocation (including dissemination of harmful images and messages and omission of positive images and messages); exclusion of constituent groups of society (such as women, minorities, the aged, and the disadvantaged); stereotyping and typecasting; lack of concern for social responsibility and the common good; and lack of respect for persons as self-determining agents. When students sense one or more of these issues may be operating in a case, they have taken the first step in recognizing that there is a moral consideration to be made.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #2: Determine the actor**

This requires students to consider who the moral actor is, or who has responsibility in a given situation. “If this is a moral issue, Whose is it? Is it mine?” Am I “morally obligated and empowered to do anything in the face of the moral issues raised?” (Kidder, 1995, p. 183). This step gives students an opportunity to discuss personal moral responsibility. For example, how does one decide who is the appropriate moral actor, and when must an individual take a stand as an autonomous moral agent? Also, is there more than one moral actor in this situation? Does each have a different moral responsibility? Consideration of a case or issue from the points of view of the moral responsibilities of different actors helps develop moral perspective.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #3: Gather relevant facts**

This step requires the ethical decision maker to gather and recognize all the information and facts needed to make a decision in the case. This may seem too obvious to mention, but students may prematurely decide about the disposition of a case without carefully identifying and considering relevant facts. The first of the four steps in the Potter Box model also makes explicit the need to define the situation and identify the relevant facts, and the first questions in the Poynter Institute checklist are, “What do I know? What do I need to know?” (Black & Bryant, 1995, p. 567). Kidder (1995) said:
not to know [all the facts] leaves crucial voids in the understanding. Why? Because ethics does not happen in a theoretical vacuum, but in the push and pull of real experience, where details determine motives and character is reflected in context. (p. 184)

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #4: Test for right-versus-wrong issues**

This step is one of the unique contributions in Kidder’s approach. He distinguished in checkpoints #4 and #5 between ethical dilemmas and moral temptations, defining ethical dilemmas as right-versus-right issues. Ethical dilemmas have good and right arguments to commend them on all sides of the situation. They require careful moral reasoning to arrive at the most appropriate action. Right-versus-wrong issues, on the other hand, are moral temptations. They do not require deep philosophical/ethical analysis because they are simply wrong from the outset. Checkpoint #4 offers four tests for recognizing a right-versus-wrong moral temptation: the legal test, the stench test, the front-page test, and the Mom test (Kidder, 1995).

The legal test asked if the proposed action is illegal. If so, the situation usually is a legal question, not a moral one. The stench test requires a decision maker to refer to his or her moral intuition—to assess if “this action goes against the grain of [his or her] moral principles” (Kidder, 1995, p. 184). The front page test is the familiar test of publicity. “How would you feel if what you are about to do showed up tomorrow morning on the front pages of the nation’s newspapers?” (p. 184). The Mom test is Kidder’s appeal to a moral exemplar—a notion often discussed in conjunction with Aristotle and virtue ethics (Pojman, 1995). Kidder (1995) required the decision maker to ask, “If I were my [moral exemplar], would I do this?” (p. 184).

If a potential action fails one or more of these tests, it does not have merit as a potential course of ethical action; it is a right-versus-wrong issue—a moral temptation, and not an ethical dilemma. One must simply decide if one chooses to succumb. If the case is a moral temptation, there is no need to work it further through the checklist. If, however, the case appears to be a moral dilemma, the student continues to the next step.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #5: Test for right-versus-right paradigms**

In this step, Kidder (1995) provided another unique clarifying tool for ethical thinking. He offered four right-versus-right value sets that he said “appear to be so fundamental to the right-versus-right choices all of us face that they can rightly be called dilemma paradigms” (p. 18). These four
paradigms are (a) Truth versus Loyalty, (b) Individual versus Community, (c) Short-term versus Long-term, and (d) Justice versus Mercy (Table 1). Kidder said these are the classic tensions in most ethical dilemmas.

Students readily grasp the application of Kidder’s four paradigms in media ethics cases. For example, truth versus loyalty is often the basic right-versus-right issue in public relations cases, and individual versus community is the classic tension in journalism privacy issues. Many cases involve all four paradigms. These categories are useful in articulating and classifying the nature of the dilemma and, as Kidder (1995) said, in bringing “sharply into focus the fact that it is indeed a genuine dilemma, in that it pits two deeply held core values against each other” (p. 185).

Table 1. Kidder’s Right-Versus-Right Paradigms (Kidder, 1995)

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<th>TRUTH</th>
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<th>SHORT-TERM</th>
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<td>Future goals or prospects</td>
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<th>JUSTICE</th>
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<td>Fairness</td>
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<td>Compassion</td>
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<td>Equity</td>
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Even-handed application of the law or rule

Love

The Potter Box model also requires the identification of governing values in a moral dilemma under consideration, but Kidder’s identification of four sets of conflicting values is a meaningful contribution to the sometimes
rather nondefinitive discussions in media ethics literature about how one goes about identifying applicable values in the Potter Box process. Kidder’s right-versus-right dilemma paradigms help students conceptualize the specific counter-tensions or conflicting values in an ethical dilemma.

Kidder (1995) also went beyond identification of the dilemma paradigms to theorize about which value in each of the sets should hold the most weight. He acknowledged “there is no invariably ‘right’ side” (p. 219) to the competing values, but all things being equal, he is able to make a choice between them. He imagined a situation in which there is “a level playing field, on which both sides have equal weight and nothing in the situation drives you more toward one of these sides than toward the other” (pp. 219–220), and in which he is compelled, all things being equal, to choose between the competing values in each dilemma paradigm set. He then “comes down” on each of the paradigms as follows: truth over loyalty (“The history of this century suggests that those who put loyalty above truth . . . are capable of doing terrible damage to the world”); community over individual (“Individualism and its emphasis on rights has run to such extremes in this century that it has done serious damage to community and its emphasis on responsibilities”); long term over short term (“The long term always includes the short term, whereas short-term thinking . . . does not always provide for the long term”); and mercy over justice (“I can imagine a world so full of love that justice, as we now know it, would no longer be necessary. But I cannot imagine a world so full of justice that there would no longer be any need for love”; pp. 220–221).

The reflection required by considering countervailing tensions in the core value paradigms is a meaningful expansion of the tools of moral reflection that can lead students to the heart of media ethics cases. Additionally, however, students will need still to identify and consider other values central to each case, such as the role-specific duties and values of journalists, advertisers, and public relations professionals. The Poynter Institute checklist is specific about the importance of considering one’s role. Its list of questions includes: “What is my professional purpose, role, or duty?” and “What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?” (Black & Bryant, 1995, p. 567).

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #6: Apply the Resolution Principles**

In Kidder’s checklist, one does not move to resolve issues until they have been thoroughly defined, thus giving clarity to the ethical problem before
working to resolve it. Kidder’s Checkpoint #6 is to apply the resolution principles. This equates to using for moral analysis the familiar canon of philosophies that are presented in media ethics literature. Kidder characterized utilitarian ethics as the ends-based principle, deontological ethics as the rule-based principle, and Judeo-Christian ethics (or the Golden Rule) as the care-based principle. He said the goal of applying these resolution principles is “to locate the line of reasoning that seems most relevant and persuasive to the issue at hand” (Kidder, 1995, p. 185).

The notions of ends-based, rule-based, and care-based resolution principles can be helpful, but Kidder’s treatment of the application of principles is not sufficiently deep or intense for a media ethics course. A more definitive discussion about the application of philosophical theories is needed, as are discussions about career- and issue-specific values and decision making checklists. In place of Kidder’s resolution principles, students should be introduced in this checkpoint to Kant, Mill, Rawls, Ross, Judeo-Christian ethics, Aristotle, Bok, and/or other ethicists, theories, and decision-making frameworks of the instructor’s choice.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #7: Investigate the “trilemma” options**

This step requires students to look beyond, the obvious to find other alternatives that are ethical courses of action and that achieve ethical outcomes. It emphasizes the need to consider a creative third way, middle ground, or compromise to resolve the trilemma (p. 185). For example, what alternative courses of action might be appropriate in lieu of invasion of privacy or deception in newsgathering?

The careful search for all options and alternative courses of action needs specific emphasis in teaching media ethics. One of the basic skills taught in texts and courses about problem-solving procedures is to identify and explore all alternatives. For example, Hamilton’s (1993), basic steps of problem-solving procedure are (it) define the problem, (b) research and analyze the problem, (c) establish a checklist of criteria which an acceptable alternative must meet, (d) list all possible alternatives, (e) evaluate each alternative, and (f) select the best alternative (pp. 273–287). Bok, “a former lecturer of decision making” (Rivers & Mathews, 1988, p. 41), reminds her readers of the natural propensity to turn to easy solutions when she says of lying, “The fact is that reasons to lie occur to most people quite often. Not many stop to examine the choices confronting them . . .” (Bok, 1989, pp. xvii–xviii). The search for alternatives is explicitly required in Bok’s (1989) decision-making
model about deception, and in other models such as Sims’s (quoted in Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995), which requires decision makers to “list your options—all of them” (cited in Seib & Fitzpatrick p. 37). Kidder’s Checkpoint #7 reminds students of this need to broaden their perspectives and alternatives in the search for ethical resolutions.

Kidder (1995) says this step is listed in the #7 position “for convenience,” but that it can “kick into action at any point throughout this [decision-making] process” (p. 185). For purposes of teaching moral reasoning in media ethics, this step seems to fit more sequentially at the beginning of the decision making process. Thus, students would identify all possible courses of action and then run them through the resolution principles for moral assessment. But, as Kidder said, consideration of the “trilemma options” can come at any point in the decision-making process, and this step can be continually revisited until a decision is made.

**Kidder’s Checkpoint #8: Make the decision**

Checkpoint #8 requires a decision about what action should be taken. Kidder said, “The exercise of ethical decision making is often seen as the highest fulfillment of the human condition” (1995, p. 186), but the need actually to make a decision is sometimes overlooked.

Perhaps that’s because the intellectual wrestling required in the previous steps can seem exhaustive, leaving little energy for the final decision. Or perhaps it’s that a quasi-academic mind-set comes into play, confusing analysis with action and failing to move from the theoretical to the practical. (p. 186)

Students often are confused by the analysis of right-versus-right issues. In hard cases, they see the valid arguments on all sides of the dilemma, and find it difficult to make a decision. Students should be required not only to analyze cases, but to state a decision about a course of action, and then to defend and justify that position.

Kidder does not discuss justification in his checkpoints, but for classroom purposes this requirement should be added to the Kidder model. As Bok (1989) explains in her principle of publicity, moral actors should be able to justify their decisions publicly in such a way as to legitimately convince others of the defensibility of the action. Similarly, the last question of the Poynter Institute checklist requires decision makers to ask themselves, “Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?” (Black & Bryant, 1995, p. 567).
**CHECKPOINT #9: REVISIT AND REFLECT ON THE DECISION**

Kidder’s final step is a feedback loop in which by hindsight, after action has been taken, the lessons that emerge from the decision and the produced outcomes are revisited and reflected upon. For classroom purposes, this step can be modified to have students project the outcomes, and then reflect on the insights that might be gleaned from those outcomes. Another application of this step is to conceptualize it as leading back in a circular manner to Checkpoint #1, thus creating a Potter Box-type process or cycle of moral analysis. Students work through the checkpoints, make and justify their decision, consider the outcomes, and then work back through the checklist as a means of testing their decision, this time with the heightened insight provided by having worked through it before.

**REVISED KIDDER MODEL**

Based on Kidder’s checklist and the discussion above, Table 2 proposes a revised model for sequencing the ethical decision making process, identifying morally relevant issues, clarifying values, seeking ethical alternatives, and making and justifying ethical decisions in media ethics cases.

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**Table 2. Revised Kidder Model for Ethical Decision Making in Media Ethics Classes (Kidder, 1995)**

1. **Identify the relevant facts** (including details and context).
2. **Recognize and identify the relevant moral issue(s).** Where is the potential for harm? Common issues in media ethics cases include: deception; misrepresentation; unfairness; disloyalty; conflicts of interest; careerism (greed and self-interest); sensationalism; violence or threats of harm; pornography; poor taste; invasions of privacy; pandering; misappropriation of intellectual and creative property; inappropriate resource allocation; exclusion of constituent groups in society; stereotyping; typecasting; lack of concern for social responsibility and the common good; lack of respect for persons as self-determining agents.
3. **Determine the moral actor(s).** “If this is a moral issue, whose is it? Is it mine?” Am I “morally obligated and empowered to do anything in the face of the moral issues raised?” (Kidder, p. 183).
4. **Investigate the “trilemma” options.** Is there a third way? A middle ground? A compromise? Identify and list all possible alternatives and courses of action.
5. **Test for right-versus-wrong issues** to determine if this is a moral temptation:
   - **The legal test** (Is it legal?)
   - **The intuition test** (Does this action go against the grain of my moral principles?)
   - **The publicity test** (How would I feel if this action were to become public?)
   - **The moral exemplar test** (Would a person of high moral stature do this?)

If the situation is a moral temptation (a right-versus-wrong issue), stop here. Choose between doing the right and doing the wrong. No further ethical reflection is needed. However, if it is not a clear right-versus-wrong issue, continue.

6a. **Test for right-versus-right dilemma paradigms:**
   - **Truth** vs. **Loyalty** (honesty vs. commitment, promise-keeping, Allegiance)
   - **Individual** vs. **Community** (self, us vs. them, others)
   - **Short-term** vs. **Long-term** (now, immediate desires vs. then, future goals)
   - **Justice** vs. **Mercy** (fairness vs. compassion, empathy, love)

6b. **Identify other role-specific values and duties** (including organizational policies and professional guidelines)

7. **Apply resolution principles.** “Locate the line of reasoning that seems most relevant and persuasive to the issue at hand” (Kidder, p. 185).
   - Kant’s Categorical Imperative
   - Mill’s Principle of Utility
   - Rawls’s Veil of Ignorance
   - Ross’s Prima Facie Duties
   - Judeo-Christian Ethics
   - Aristotle’s Golden Mean
   - Other ethicists, theories, and decision making frameworks of choice, such as: Bok (1989), Elliott (Patterson & Wilkins, 1994), Black et al. (1995), Poynter Institute (Black & Bryant, 1995), etc.

8. **Make the decision.**

9. **Justify the decision.**

10. **Revisit and reflect on the decision.** Work the decision through the model again.

*Note.* * Value Kidder would choose, all things being equal, in each set.

The revised model sequences the decision-making process somewhat differently from Kidder’s original checklist to reflect a more natural order in the analysis of a media ethics case. For example, in the revised model one
would identify the facts of the case before determining the moral actors. Kidder’s Checkpoint #7 (investigate the “trilemma” options), which he suggested could be considered at any point throughout the decision-making process, has been moved to Step 4 in the revision. This change was made to emphasize that all options should be identified and then analyzed through the succeeding steps of the process. The test for right-versus-right value paradigms has been expanded to take into consideration role-specific values and duties inherent to professional communicators’ dilemmas in media cases. Kidder’s three resolution principles have been expanded in the revised model to include the canon of theories, principles, and decision making frameworks common to moral deliberation in the field of media ethics. Finally, a step has been added in which decision makers are required to formulate a public justification for their decision.

The revised model in Table 2 includes not only the titles of the steps, but brief accompanying discussion to clarify the intent of each. It is designed to be used by students as a stand-alone tool for ethical reflection about media ethics cases.

**Applying the Revised Kidder Model**

The most significant contributions of Kidder’s decision-making framework are not in specifically applying the resolution principles in an ethical dilemma (which are well covered by the canon of approaches to moral reasoning), but in increasing moral sensitivity, discernment, and awareness of morally relevant factors in a case. Kidder’s contribution is in highlighting issues and sequencing the decision making process in such a way as to clarify the dimensions and nuances of the moral dilemma before making a decision. It prompts more focused and finely tuned moral reasoning, thus leading in the end to a better resolution. Further, Kidder’s checklist specifically requires the decision maker to seek and consider all possible alternatives before making a decision, thus assuring all possible courses of action are taken into consideration, and a better outcome will result.

In the following discussion, four cases will be discussed briefly using the revised Kidder model outlined in Table 2. The cases have been selected to highlight the strengths of various aspects of the Kidder model and therefore are presented under headings that emphasize the value of that particular step in reasoning through the representative case.
DETERMINE THE ACTOR

Case II-D in the Patterson and Wilkins text (1994, p. 39) presents a reporter who went undercover in a county nursing home to get a true picture of patient conditions and to discover what really went on in the nursing home. The story had been prompted by reports to the newspaper by nursing home employees of patient neglect.

After having clarified all of the facts in this case, and identifying the moral issues involved, the revised Kidder model requires students to give some thought to determining the moral actors. Who has responsibility here? “If this is a moral issue, whose is it?” What actors are “morally obligated and empowered to do anything in the face of the moral issues raised?” (Kidder, 1995, p. 183).

The textbook’s discussion of the case focused on the deceptive news-gathering practices, the newsworthiness and public value of the story, and the possible exploitation of the story for the newspaper’s ends. The revised model in Step 3 requires students to consider an additional issue, that of the moral actors. Who has a responsibility to act ethically here? The reporter? The editor? The nursing home director? The agency that regulates the nursing home? Do the newspaper and its employees have an ethical responsibility to investigate and print (which will require a considerable amount of time). Or, in the interest of patients who are allegedly suffering at this moment, should this matter be brought to the immediate attention of others who have power to come to their immediate aid? If the reporter is assigned to engage in the deception, is he or she an autonomous moral agent who can participate in the discussion and choose whether or not to participate in the deception? At what points in the process of the development of this story should moral actors make ethical decisions?

Long before this matter reaches the point of considering resolution principles from the newspaper’s point of view, Kidder’s model engages students in ethical reflection about moral actors and thus broadens their moral sensitivity and perspective.

TEST FOR RIGHT-VERSUS-WRONG ISSUES

Case #50 in the Christians et al. (1995, p. 226) text presents a PR executive who, faced with the opportunity to achieve competitive advantage and to secure a contract, sneaks a peek at a competitor’s proposal left unattended on the desk of a potential client. In analyzing this actor’s behavior, students
would apply the revised Kidder model by first identifying the relevant facts, including the executive’s motives. Students would then identify the relevant moral issues such as theft of intellectual property, intrusion into the privacy of the client, and “invasion of corporate documents” (Christians et al., 1995, p. 227). The actor in the case is clearly the PR executive and he already has chosen from among his available courses of action by stealthily perusing the competitor’s proposal. With this as a background, students must test for the right-versus-wrong issues by applying the legal test, the intuition test, the publicity test, and the moral exemplar test. Inasmuch as this case fails most or all of these right-versus-wrong issues (as evidenced by the detail provided in the hypothetical), the actor was not by Kidder’s definition in an ethical dilemma. Rather, this PR executive was faced with a moral temptation, and he chose to succumb. Students do not need to reason further through the right-versus-right dilemma paradigms and resolution principles to ascertain if he did the right thing. The moral reasoning and analysis stops here.

INVESTIGATE THE “TRILEMMA” OPTIONS

Case V-C in the Patterson and Wilkins text (1994, p. 126) presents a photojournalism dilemma in which students must decide if a picture of a woman should have been published in a newspaper. The photo depicts the woman in excruciating distress (as evidenced in the close-up of her face) and covered with the blood of her young son who had just been killed by a car. Students working through the Kidder model would identify the relevant facts (such as the circumstances under which the photo was taken) and the attendant moral issues (such as invasion of private grief and publication of an intensely personal moment). They would then determine the actors in this case (such as the photojournalist in shooting the picture in the first place, and the photo editor in deciding to run the photo in the paper).

In Step 4, students are prodded to think of all possible action alternatives in the case. Are the only choices to publish or not to publish this particular photo? For example, if it is important for the public to be aware of this event or the issues it raises, does the news story need to be accompanied by a photo? If it does, are there other photos that could serve the public while being less intrusive of personal grief? Prior to the question of publication, did the photojournalist have alternatives in either not taking the photo or in photo framing that would have been less intrusive of the subject’s privacy? Kidder’s model forces students to push beyond the immediate two choices of either printing or not printing the photo. It requires a consideration of other
possible alternative actions that could have been taken by moral actors at each step, from shooting the photo to printing the story.

**TEST FOR RIGHT-VERSUS-RIGHT PARADIGMS**

Case III-F in the Patterson and Wilkins text (1994, p. 80) describes the moral dilemma of a public affairs officer for the largest employer of a small city. She is told by management that the plant is going to close, thus putting many people out of work, including herself and a family to which she is morally indebted. Her dilemma, among others, is whether she has a moral responsibility to inform her friends and others in the plant and community about the plant’s closing, or to keep it secret as she has been requested to do by management.

After working through the first five steps of the revised Kidder model, students will test for the right-versus-right dilemma paradigms to identify the conflicting values in this case. They may decide that the major dilemma involves all the nuances of truth versus loyalty (such as truth to whom? and loyalty to whom?). Additionally, however, the other dilemma paradigms are important in this case as well. This actor will need to consider the needs of individuals versus those of the community, the short- and long-term consequences of any action she might take, and the justice/fairness versus mercy/compassion for all the stakeholders in each of her potential options.

Students might also benefit in this case by considering Kidder’s preferred values, all things being equal in each of the conflicting paradigms. Assuming all things are equal, would there be value in making a decision that would favor truth over loyalty, community over individuals, long term over short term, and mercy over justice?

The revised model would also require a consideration of the role-specific values and duties of this PR professional. To whom is she required to be loyal? What are her obligations to her employer and to the public? What is the role of public relations officers in situations such as this? What professional guidelines can assist her in achieving an ethical course of action?

This analysis of Kidder’s dilemma paradigms will highlight the complex nature of the situation faced by this PR professional, engender moral sensitivity and discernment, and preclude snap decisions about what she should do in this case.

**CONCLUSION**

Christians et al. (1995), said “the study of ethics requires deliberation, careful distinctions, and extended discussion” (p. ix). The identified analytical
skills, ethical awareness, and moral imagination as attributes needed in the study of media ethics (p. xi). Similarly, in his foreword to Patterson and Wilkins (1994), Christians suggested that critical thinking, systematic reflection, and moral discernment are nurtured through the analysis and discussion of cases that push “toward substantive issues and integra[tion of] appropriate theory in the decision making process” (pp. xiv–xv).

In their introduction, Black, Steele, and Barney (1995) suggested that ethical thinking must be reasoned, principled, and consistent (p. 2):

Doing ethics ... is not just deciding between two choices, right and wrong, when facing an ethical dilemma. True ethical decisionmaking is much more difficult and complex. It’s about developing a range of acceptable actions and choosing from among them. It’s about considering the consequences of those actions. And it’s about basing decisions on obligation [and principles].... True ethical decisionmaking is also about public justification, the ability to explain clearly and fully the process of how and why decisions are made.... Ethical decisionmaking entails competition among values.... The ability to make good ethical decisions in the face of difficult challenges is also a great skill, which can be taught and learned. (p. 39)

Kidder’s model for ethical decision making is a valuable tool by which media ethics instructors can help students develop these skills and habits of mind for deliberation in the classroom and for application in the work place.

REFERENCES
