

Ethics Litmus Tests

This work is licenced under an Attribution
NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence.

Please don't charge others for the use of this pack.

Please print on recycled paper if possible.

Enjoy!

Instructions for use — Ethics Litmus Tests

Use the cards on your own, with a friend, or in a group.

Start by describing the problem, scenario, or motivating concern. Usually these are sourced from current or recent work. Sometimes they are recurring niggles. They can be very loose, for example:

"I feel uncomfortable with this outcome"

or

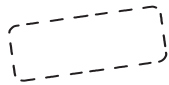
"I'm not sure we have thought through the consequences"

Or else the 'driver' or 'motivator' can be quite specific. This is helpful for playing with larger groups. For example:

"What if we have a data breach and don't realise?"

or

"What if our automated decision-making is biased?"



1) The classic litmus

Got a wiggly feeling, not sure what to do? Start here.

- Write down your ethical 'motivator'.
- Pick a litmus card at random.
- Insert a real person (if indicated).
- Take a moment to hold the provocation in your mind. Try to examine it from a few different perspectives.
- Write down your response(s).

What did you learn? Did that help you identify next steps?

If it's not clear, maybe put this aside and try again in a week.

If you find a specific card especially useful, use it often!

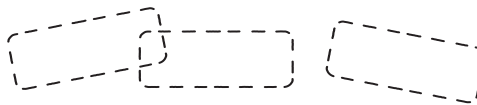
If you prefer to be surprised, that's great, too.



2) Two heads

A twist on the Classic Litmus. Pair with a colleague.

- Together define and write down your ethical motivator
- Pick a litmus card at random
- Write down your responses to the litmus card individually
- Share your responses with each other - compare and contrast. Are you surprised? Explain your thinking.



3) The problem definition

Not sure how to talk about the thing that's worrying you?

- Lay out the entire pack so you can sort through the questions
- Select three questions that best describe the thing
- Now can you write down your ethical motivator or question?

Try sharing the questions you selected and the motivator with a colleague as a starting point for discussion.



4) The brainstorm

Get your team together - 5-7 is a good number.

- Together define and write down your ethical motivator
- Pick a litmus card at random (or feel free to pre-select a relevant card)
- Hand out square post-it notes of a single color

- Ask all your team members to respond to the card with two or three responses - one idea per post-it.
- Review the post-its up on a wall or whiteboard.
- Cluster them to see common themes. Look for the biggest and smallest clusters.
- Explore the outliers. Invite team members to explain.
- Write a position statement summarising the team sentiment.

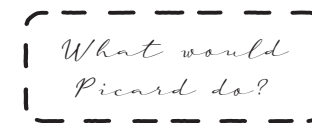
Is there a consensus? Is more discussion needed?



6) DYO - Define your own

Got another way to use the pack? Go for it!

This is your tool and you should use in the way you find most useful.



Blank cards

These are your opportunity to define your own questions! Ask yourself what motivates you, what helps you get perspective, what provides meaning when you're confused. There are 14 blank cards in each pack.

I encourage you to write your own provocations which feel relevant to your interests, background, etc. I'm a huge Star Trek fan, so a good one for me would be "What would Picard do?". To circle back to The Good Place, another example I like is "What would Chidi think about this?".

Digital download — Ethics Litmus Tests

Would I be happy if it
happened to my ?
CLOSE OLDER RELATIVE

Is this something I'd want
to be known for in future?

Is this a turning point
or a footnote?

Would I feel uncomfortable if
 saw this?
SOMEONE I ADMIRE

Do I have a strong opinion
that others may disagree with?

What if this was put online?

Conjure your 8 year old self.
Do they agree with you?

How can I get inside someone
else's point of view?

Why am I having a strong
emotional response to this?

What's the worst
that could happen?

Jump forwards 50 years.
Did this age well?

Make a strong argument
for the opposition

How would I feel if this was the
last thing I did in this job?

Does this represent me well?

Is this a zero-sum game?

It's my last day at work.
Am I happy to sign-off on this?

Digital download — Ethics Litmus Tests

Can I focus more on outcomes
and less on causes?

Can I feel about it more and
rationalise about it less?

Would I spend $\frac{\text{COST OF GROCERY SHOP}}{\text{COST OF GROCERY SHOP}}$ of
my own money to shift direction?

How would I feel if $\frac{\text{COLLEAGUE I RESPECT}}{\text{COLLEAGUE I RESPECT}}$
strongly opposed my position?

Is it important or urgent?

Are we procrastinating or
avoiding a bigger issue?

Do I have enough context
to make a decision?

How can I evaluate and
compare possible futures?

If I don't discuss it further,
will it play on my mind?

What are my motives?

Would my idea of what's fair
clash with someone else's?

Which is the least bad outcome?

What have we forgotten or ignored?

Would I want $\frac{\text{CLOSE YOUNGER RELATIVE}}{\text{CLOSE YOUNGER RELATIVE}}$
to hear about this?

Would this scenario be easy to
misinterpret or miscommunicate?

Is this the person $\frac{\text{MY DOG, CAT, PET, ETC}}{\text{MY DOG, CAT, PET, ETC}}$
thinks I am?

Digital download — Ethics Litmus Tests

Does this make me feel more or less like myself?

What's the most charitable interpretation?

Are the incentives helping or harming?

What are the limits of my imagination?

Does this feel like the future I want to work towards?

Have we assessed the cost of failure?

Can I be more vulnerable?

Am I relying on someone else's ignorance?

Is this principles-based or ad hoc?

What if it happened to me?

How could I assess the value of competing futures?

Is this an accepted moral standard or a spec in proposal?

How can I help _____ understand my concerns?
COLLEAGUE / MANAGER

Would it be ok if this happened IRL instead of on a computer?

Turn off your cynical inner voice.
Now what?

Can I feel someone's pain and take action to help?

Digital download — Ethics Litmus Tests

Consider short-term vs.
long-term consequences

Who has the most and least
power in this scenario?