

Which of these 8 Ethical Styles Are You?

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What's your ethical style? Different people have different premises, different ways of arguing, different ways of doing the right thing.

In *Ethical Insight and Ethical Action*, it mentions that there are really eight ethical styles: Rule-Bound, Utilitarian, Loyalist, Prudent, Virtuous, Intuitive, Empathetic, and Darwinian. Each of these styles have their advantages and disadvantages and some individuals might be a mix of two or three, so understanding the differences to resolve conflicts among ethical styles can sometimes be as important and as difficult as resolving the ethical problems themselves.

Here are descriptions of each of the eight ethical styles. See which style resonates with you and share with us on Twitter!

"It's #EthicsAwarenessMonth! What's your ethical style? @ICMA #ICMAEthicsMatter <http://bit.ly/1posLqS>" [Click here to tweet it!](#) (Don't forget to add your style to the tweet)

1. RULE-BOUND.

Thinking and acting on the basis of rules and principles, paying only secondary regard to circumstances or exceptions.

2. UTILITARIAN.

Weighing probable consequences, both to the company and to the public well-being. Principles are important only as a rule of thumb. "The greatest good for the greatest number of people" is the ultimate test for any action or decision.

3. LOYALIST.

Evaluating all decisions first in terms of benefit to the company and its reputation. The concern with reputation (motivated by one's own pride in the company) also ensures

general conformity to laws and principles and concern with the company's role in the larger social picture. (Also called the "company man.")

4. PRUDENT.

Weight probable consequences to oneself and one's own concerns but always including long-range considerations of company reputation, public trust, customer and supplier relations, ability to obtain loans, etc. Prudence is not the same as selfishness or crude self-interest (though it is sometimes called "enlightened self-interest") since it has built into it the mutual dependence of one's own interests and company interests.

5. VIRTUOUS.

Every action is measured in terms of its reflection of one's character or the company reputation, without immediate regard to consequences and often without paying much attention to general principles.

6. INTUITIVE.

Making decisions on the basis of "conscience" and without deliberation, argument, or reasons, the intelligence of which may not be immediately apparent. Intuitive thinkers tend to be extremely impatient with more deliberative, rule-bound, and utilitarian types.

7. EMPATHETIC.

Following one's feelings, in particular, feelings of sympathy and compassion. "Putting oneself in the other's place" is the modus operandi of the sentimental style, whether the "other" be a competitor ("How would you like it if he...") or a customer ("Suppose you found yourself stuck with...").

8. DARWINIAN.

Whoever survives must be right. In some versions, this is clearly not an ethical position (e.g., "If we win, we're right, but if they win, we were wronged"). But a consistent Darwinian fully accepts the possibility and even the desirability of his or her own failure to a superior competitor, without complaint.

Want to learn more on the topic of ethics? Join ICMA's Director of Ethics, [Martha Perego](#), for an interactive session on how the values and guidelines of the [Code](#) apply to you. [The free session is on Monday, March 21 at 1:00 p.m.!](#)