

Ethical Issues in Group Practice with Technology: Challenges and Opportunities

Allan Barsky, JD, MSW, PhD
Sandler School of Social Work, FAU
Boca Raton, FL, USA 33431
<http://barsky.org>



“International Association for Social Work
With Groups” Conference
Madrid, Spain [UCM Room 213]
June 14, 2024 @ 12:00 to 13:00

Objectives

Recognize

ethical issues and risks pertaining to group work and technology

Engage

group members in empowering discussions regard managing confidentiality, safety, informed consent, & other ethical issues re use of tech

Develop policies

for managing confidentiality, safety, informed consent, & other ethical issues re technology in SW with groups.




Agenda

- Intro to Ethics and a Framework for Managing Ethical Issues
- Small Group Discussion of Ethics in SW with Technology
- Questions

That's all folks!





The study of
ethics invites us
to ask:

- What are we doing?
- Why are we doing it?
- What should we be doing that would be better?
- Why would that alternative be better?

Framework for Managing Ethical Issues

Focus Today
1 to 3



* Loop back as needed

1. Types of Ethical Issues

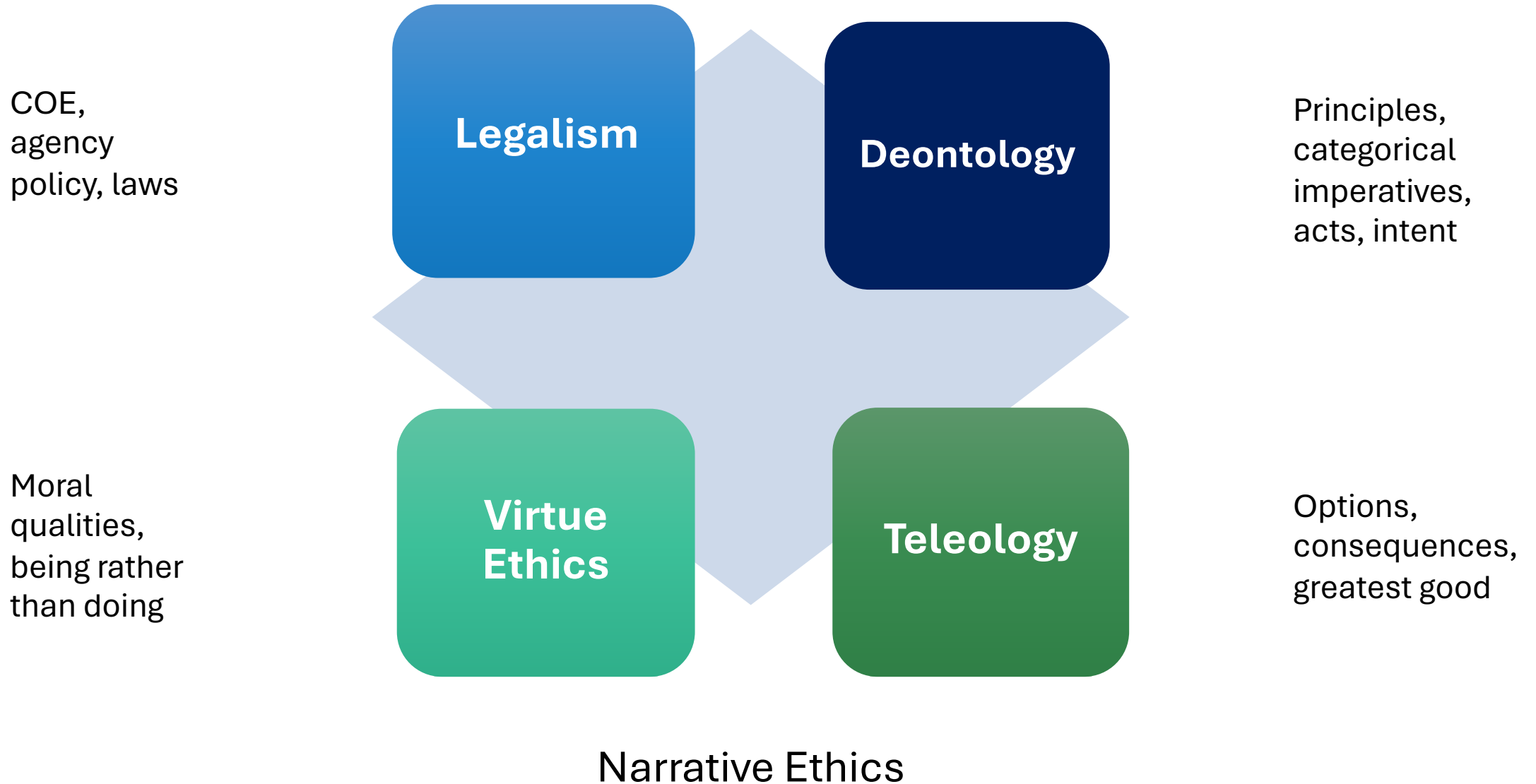
Questions	
What standards should we use to guide our practice?	Good, ethical practice
Was there a breach?	Determining whether there was a violation, falling below standard expected...
There was a breach... what do we do now?	Accountability, corrective action, cleaning up a mess
How do deal with an ethical dilemma?	Managing conflicting obligations
How do we deal with moral distress?	Knowing what is ethical, but external pressures make it difficult

2. Sources of Help

- Supervisor
- Consultant
- Attorney
- Professional Association
- Regulator Body
- The Group
- AI?



3. Approaches to Critical Thinking



How is Ethics in SW with Groups Different?

Facilitator's
obligations to
Group

Members
obligations to
each other

Individually
and as
Collective

Conflict and
Consensus

Democratic
Processes

Facilitator's ethical duties depend on...

- Type of Group
 - Task, Support, Self-Help, Therapy
- Facilitator's COE
- Agency Policy
- Legal Framework
- Group members

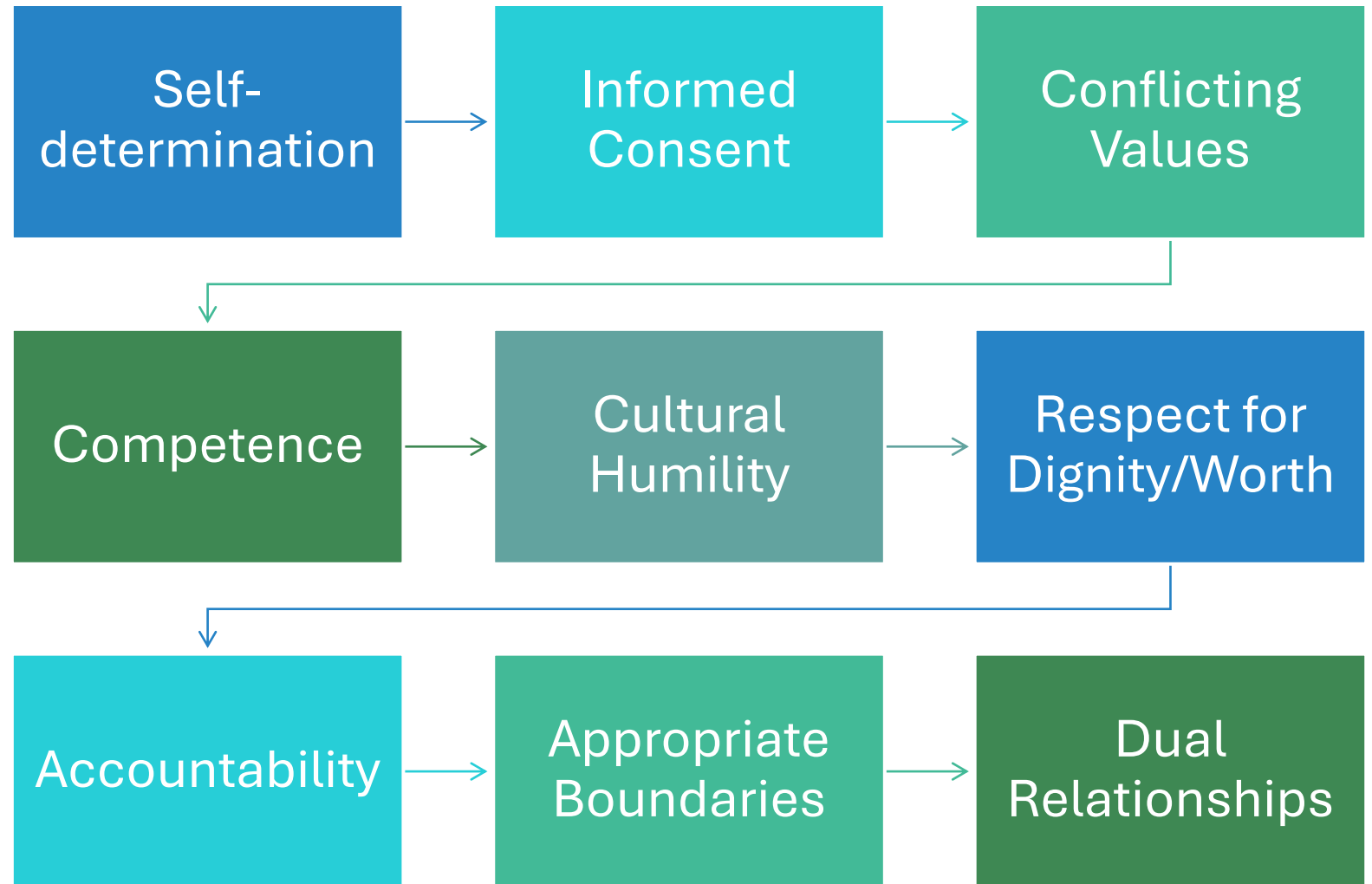


Tech in Group Work: Examples

- Videoconferencing
- AI as Facilitator
- Electronic Records
- Brainstorming Apps
- Problem-Solving Apps
- Social Media Engagement
- Virtual Reality
- BITs
- Remote case management
- Other?



Examples of Ethical Issues



What is AI?

Digital systems, programs, or machines

that can perform tasks previously achievable only through

human reasoning, perception or reasoning

(IT Chronicles, 2023)

Mimics human intelligence



Small Group Discussions (3-4 people)

1. Introduce selves
2. Appoint facilitator and reporter
3. Review situation
4. Identify 1 to 3 Ethical Issues – choose one to analyze
5. Identify appropriate sources of help
6. Use at least 2 methods of critical thinking:
 - Legalism: laws, policies, COEs
 - Deontology: acting on principle
 - Teleology: option with best outcome
 - Virtues: moral qualities
7. Work toward consensus and prepare to report back



Situation 1: Siri as Facilitator



Apple has programmed Siri with AI to facilitate support groups



Your agency is considering using Siri to facilitate a support group for people with anxiety



What ethical issues should be considered?

Situation 2: Online Social Network

- Javi (SW) develops an online social network group to provide education and support to undocumented refugees, many of whom fear deportation
- Members may ask questions for help with legal issues, housing, food, and safety
- What are the ethical “goods” about this group?
- What are the ethical “concerns” about this group?
- How would Javi tailor the group to maximize goods and manage the concerns/risks?



Situation 3: Shared Docs

- IDEAs is a social action group that promotes “inclusion, diversity, equity, and anti-oppression:
- Group uses shared Google docs for minutes of meetings, research, and strategic planning
- Confidentiality is important to avoid unauthorized access by people who oppose IDEAs
- What values are served by having shared online documents?
- What ethical principles or standards may be at risk?
- What alternatives might the group consider?

Situation 4: Videoconference

- Sober Souls is a spirituality-based group for people in recovery from addictions
- Some members want to move the in-person group to fully online using videoconferencing –
 - Anonymity, ease of access, more inclusive, cost-effective, health concerns (COVID), easy recording and documentation
- Other members want to keep the group in-person
 - More intimate and trustworthy, meaningful human relationships are in-person, physical interaction, digital fatigue, tech barriers, greater risk of miscommunication (lack of verbal cues)
- How would you help the group decide which option? Assume that splitting the group in two is not an option.
- What is the problem with majority rule?



Situation 5: MSW Student Paper

- Prof. Knave assigns a group essay on SW ethics
- Students use AI to complete the essay
- Identify 4 examples of ethical uses of AI to complete the essay?
- Identify 4 examples of unethical uses of AI to complete the essay?
- How might a policy help with ethical use of AI?
- What should the policy say?
- Ask ChatGPT to answer this question... <https://chatgpt.com/>
- How effective was ChatGPT to answer this question?

Questions



Conclusions

- Focus on values: respect, access, human relationships, privacy, fairness, empowerment, inclusiveness...
- Foster culture of responsibility, connection, and moral courage
- Engage in collaborative discussion and problem solving
- Practice, pilot test, and evaluate
- Apply principles of *futurism*: consider trends, anticipate change, prepare for multiple possibilities, re-evaluate ethics in light of new technologies in SW with groups



References

- Barsky, A. E. (2023). *Essential ethics for social work practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Barsky, A. E. (2023, July 7). Ethics alive! Artificial intelligence: Tricks or tools for social work education and practice. *The New Social Worker*. <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/ethics-articles/artificial-intelligence-tricks-or-tools-for-social-work-education-practice>
- Barsky, A. E. (2023). Ethics and technology in emergency situations. In A. L. Peláez & G. Kirwan (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of digital social work* (Chapter 32). [Routledge](#).
- Barsky, A. E. (2019). Technology and boundary concerns in social work field education. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning in Health and Social Care*, 16, 81-98. <https://journals.whitingbirch.net/index.php/JPTS/article/view/1215>
- Barsky, A. E. (2017). Social work practice and technology: Ethical issues and policy responses. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 35(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2017.1277906>
- Barsky, A. E. (in press). Values and ethics in social work with groups: A holistic approach. In C. S. Cohen, M. Macgowan, & R. Toseland (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook on social work with groups*. [Routledge](#)
- Bezrukova, K., Griffith, T. L., Spell, C., Rice, V., & Yang, H. E. (2023). Artificial intelligence and groups: Effects of attitudes and discretion on collaboration. *Group & Organization Management*, 48(2), 629-670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011231160574>
- Hung, E. N., Lee, T. T., Cheung, C. (2021). Practising social work groups online: Practitioners' reflection on the COVID-19 outbreak. *International Social Work*, 64(5), 756-760. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020872821989796>

International Association of Social Work with Groups (IASWG). (2022). Standards for social work practice with groups (with online considerations) (2nd ed.).

<https://www.iaswg.org/assets/2015%20IASWG%20Standards%20with%20ONLINE%20CONSIDERATIONS%20BOARD%20APPROVED%20121122.pdf>

LinkedIn. (n.d.). Facilitation: How can you use artificial intelligence to coordinate cross-functional teams in the workplace? Retrieved February 13, 2024 from <https://www.linkedin.com/advice/3/how-can-you-use-artificial-intelligence-coordinate-1t0mc#:~:text=AI%20can%20support%20facilitators%20in,and%20providing%20real%2Dtime%20feedback>

Mathiyazhagan, S. (2021). Field practice, emerging technologies, and human rights: The emergence of tech social workers. *Journal of Human Rights in Social Work*, 7(4), 441-448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-021-00190-0>

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2021). Code of ethics.

<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

Pascoe, K. M. (2023). Considerations for integrating technology into social work practice: A content analysis of nine professional social work associations' Codes of Ethics. *International Social Work*, 66(2), 298-312.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820980833>

Page, B. J. (2003). Introduction to using technology in group work. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 28, 1, 7-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/714860205>

Seeber, I. et al. (2020). Machines as teammates: A research agenda on AI in team collaboration. *Information & Management*, 57(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2019.103174>