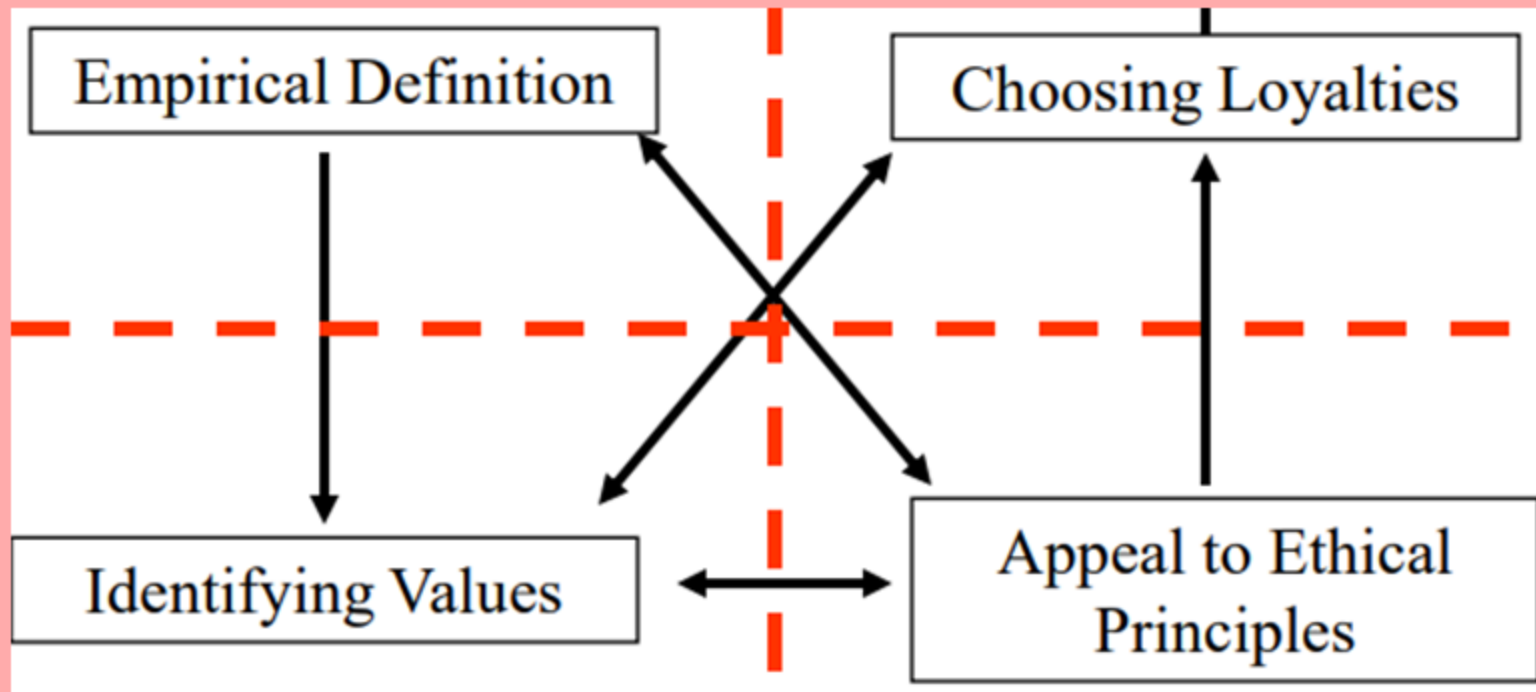


Research outta the box: The Potter Box across the curriculum



Who's *Potter*?

Ralph Benajah Potter, Jr. (b. 1931, retired 2003)

Professor of social ethics emeritus, Harvard

BA Occidental College

BD McCormick Theological Seminary

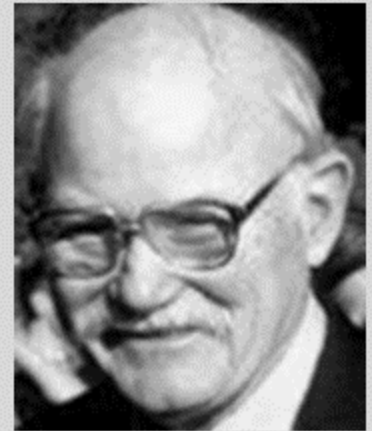
ThD, Harvard University

Ordained Presbyterian minister

Founding fellow Hastings Ctr for Bioethics

Member, Society for Values in Higher Ed.

Member, Société européenne de la culture



What's *Potter's* “box” and why care?

Potter's *doctoral dissertation* led to the “box”

Diss. topic = Christian position on nuclear weapons

Weapons use topic could not be pursued properly

...no single *Christian justification* seemed to exist

...multiple elements of *belief* were in play

...people's concrete *decisions* are “system”-based

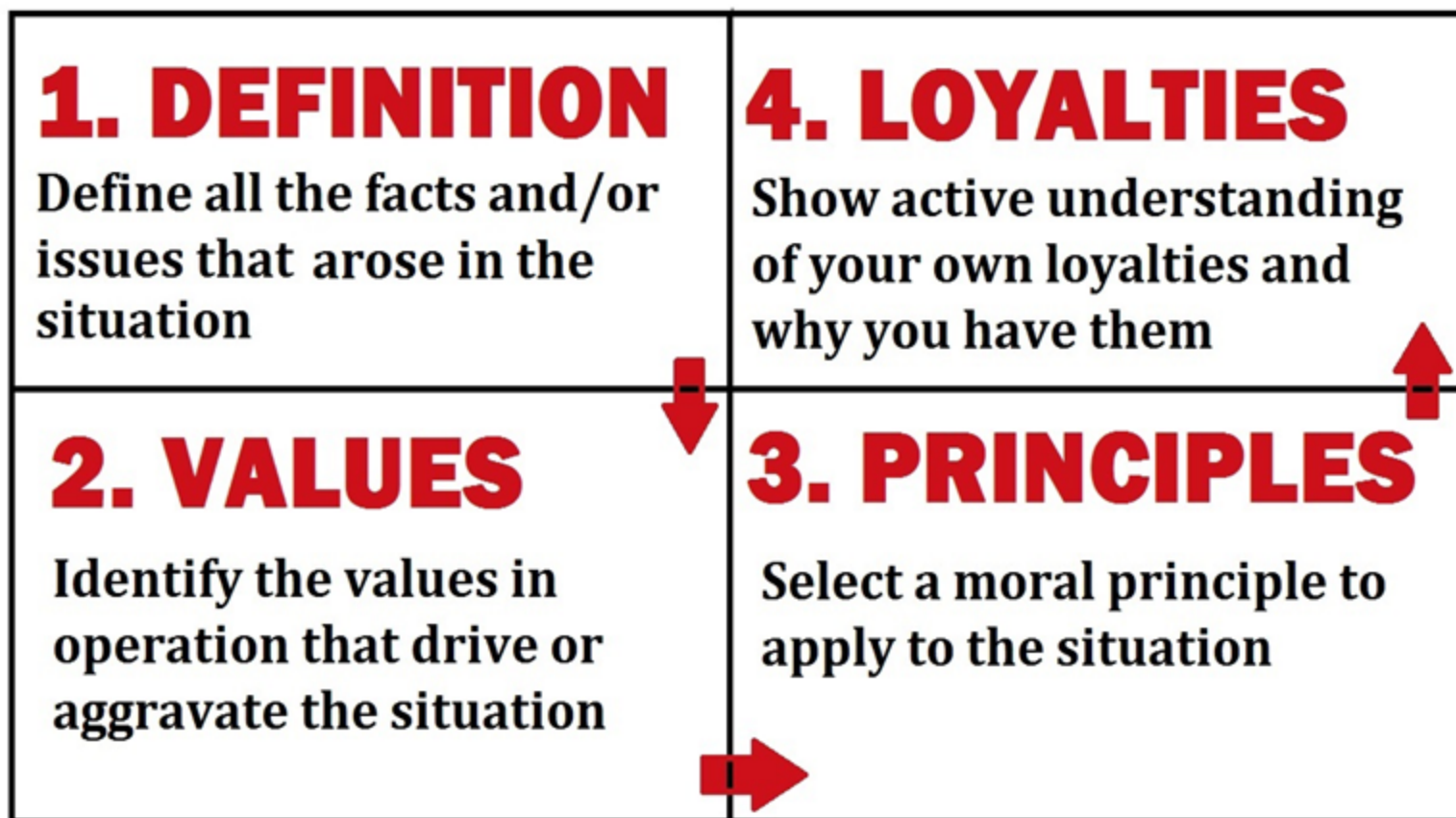
Weapons use/non-use = a *decision* like other ones

Aha! All decisions require a balance:

“Real-life” facts v. philosophical values

Boxed! Deciding anything ethically

THE POTTER BOX



Some purposes for *use of Potter Box*

- Make people *aware* of how they make decisions
- Make ppl *acknowledge* need for ethical reasoning
- Make ppl *recognize* values & loyalties
- Make ppl *realize* that decisions are round-about!



Potter Box “Definitions” quadrant

The *definition* stage of the Box concerns FACTS

Set out all facts, great and small

Make no judgments; *leave out* no facts

How would you *define* the situation, from FACTS?

What do you *know*?

What *don't you know* that you wish you did?

How would others *describe* the situation & why?



Box “Values” quadrant

Consider all “significant” people, groups, beliefs

REMEMBER: Values influence behavior

Values = right/wrong; useful/folly



moral values: justice, fairness, honesty, openness

logical values: consistency, harmony

professional v: autonomy, pleasing one's boss

personal v: salvation, self-respect, comfort

societal v: personal responsibility & freedom

aesthetic v: beauty, pleasure

Box “Principles” quadrant

Choose a moral philosophy...

...that offers consistency in ethical thought

Steer clear of moralizing; go for...

...the ethically justifiable & the ethically consistent

Examine philosophical options:

Aristotle & Confucius: Between excess & deficiency

Jesus Christ: Selfless love for all; outcomes help all

Immanuel Kant: Do only what should be universal law

JS Mill: Seek greatest good for greatest number

J Rawls: Fairness = more important than greatest good

WD Ross: Humans have 7 binding duties to each other

Box “Loyalties” quadrant

Ask to whom duties/obligations are owed:

Oneself

People affected by one’s decisions

People who support one/one’s ideas financially

One’s organization, shareholders, stakeholders

One’s profession, colleagues, peers

Society at large



Using the Box: Remember

Honesty and openness count

Collaboration counts

Perfect *solutions/decisions* are unlikely

Ethical justification may be tough

The Box's four "quadrants" are iterable



Using the Box: Another example

Imagine that you're working at a big PR agency
Your chief executive informs you of your new task:
You're *assigned* 2 accounts to bring in new \$\$:
The Ku Klux Klan is seeking new members
The Right to Life Society wants to promote
a new federal ban on abortions
You must decide how to proceed...
Values, principles, loyalties...



The Box in Action: Yet another example

Imagine that you are the newsroom editor

One of your reporters has hot news

A famed local chef has *died* from complications of AIDS

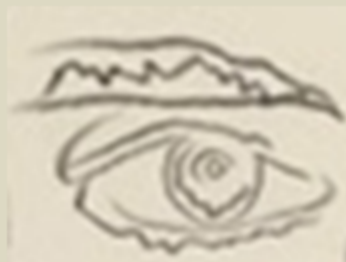
The chef *had been* a closeted gay man

The chef's AIDS *had arisen* after gay-gay sex

You must decide...

The pertinent facts, values at stake...

...ethical questions/principles, your own loyalties



The Box in Action: *Capturing* attention?

Imagine that your newspaper has lost readership

You have been *tasked* to spike interest

Your photo editor submits a *dramatic car crash shot*

The image *shows* a single burnt-up car and...

...near the car, on the street, a *crumpled child-seat*

The only *death* in the crash was the child

You must decide yes/no show the photo



The Box *used* for judgment in Malaysia

Imagine that you must decide guilt/innocence:

Burglar *enters* a house...

Burglar *encounters* woman, *slashes* her with knife

Woman's husband & son *respond*, tying up burglar

Slashed woman *is rushed* to hospital

Burglar *dies* while tied up

Husband & son are *charged* with murder

Husband & son *plead* self-defense

The Box *used* in Liverpool Murder case

Two ten-year-olds are tried for kidnapping...

...torturing, and murdering a two-year-old

Question: Who is “right”?

British law forbids publishing names/histories of children facing criminal charges; the

British Home Office spent 13k £ for privacy

US law calls for all names to be published

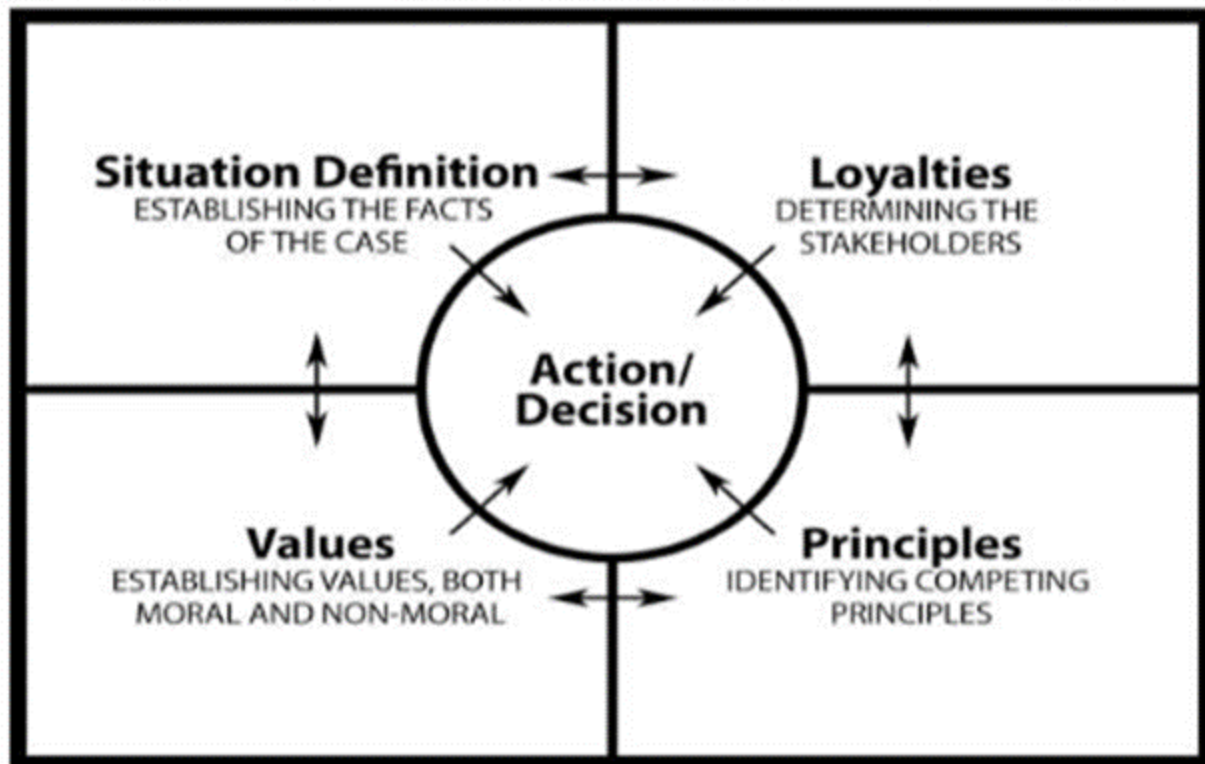
Foreign Press Assn sues British Home Office

When *applying* The Box to decide...

Recall that:

The Box represents an iterative process

Different people will make different decisions



Can you Box? Deploy a “Quizlet” to see

Q1: The DEFINITION stage of the Potter Box concerns *facts*. This is where the analyst should set out all facts, without making judgments or hiding any details.

You must ask: How do YOU define the situation

You must ask: What don't you know that you must know

You must ask: How might others describe this situation



“Quizlet”, continued...

Q2: The VALUES part of the Box refers to specific concerns of a particular profession or group. For example, journalists may have concerns different from those of an advertising executive. Teachers and students may have different concerns. But one of the benefits of the Potter Box is that it is applicable to *almost any* different situation.

You must *ask*: What are all the values at play here?

“Quizlet” encore...

Q3: LOYALTIES have to do with people or organizations to/with whom the decision-maker holds allegiances. For example, in journalism, the first allegiance is always to the public. Other allegiances might be to the editor, industry organizations, or coworkers

When YOU make a decision, *ask*:

Who/what are all the parties affected & how?

“Quizlet” at last

Q4: PRINCIPLES = ethical philosophies or modes of reasoning that may apply to a situation. Considering a thing from several ethical perspectives leads to better understanding. Some ethical philosophies that Potter suggests: *Aristotle's golden mean, Kant's categorical imperative, Mill's principle of utility, etc.*



Ask yourself: How does each perspective fit?

3-2-1 about a *four-part Box*

What are **THREE** things ...

...that you have learned about the Potter Box?

What are **TWO** things that you have found ...

... to be interesting & you want to know more of?

What is **ONE** question that you still have ...

... about The Box?

