



# Ethical Practices: Part One

Stephen Downes

December 22, 2021

# Ethical Practices

Managing for risk

The need for practices, not principles

Some simple practices

Frameworks:

- Ethical practices frameworks
- Data governance frameworks
- IT governance frameworks
- Human Rights Frameworks

Activation of Ethical Practices

Title Image:

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/ethical-practice/pages/ethical-and-legal-responsibilities-for-hr-professionals.aspx>

# Managing for Risk

Re: the regulations

- These are focused on reducing risks
- Managing for risk is not ethics
  - Sometimes the most ethical route is the most ethical
  - Sometimes the safest path is the least ethical
  - Risks measure some parameters (like cost) but not others



<https://www.plato-e1ns.com/products/e1ns-solution-packages/e1ns-solution-package-medical-technology/plato-risk-management-14971/>

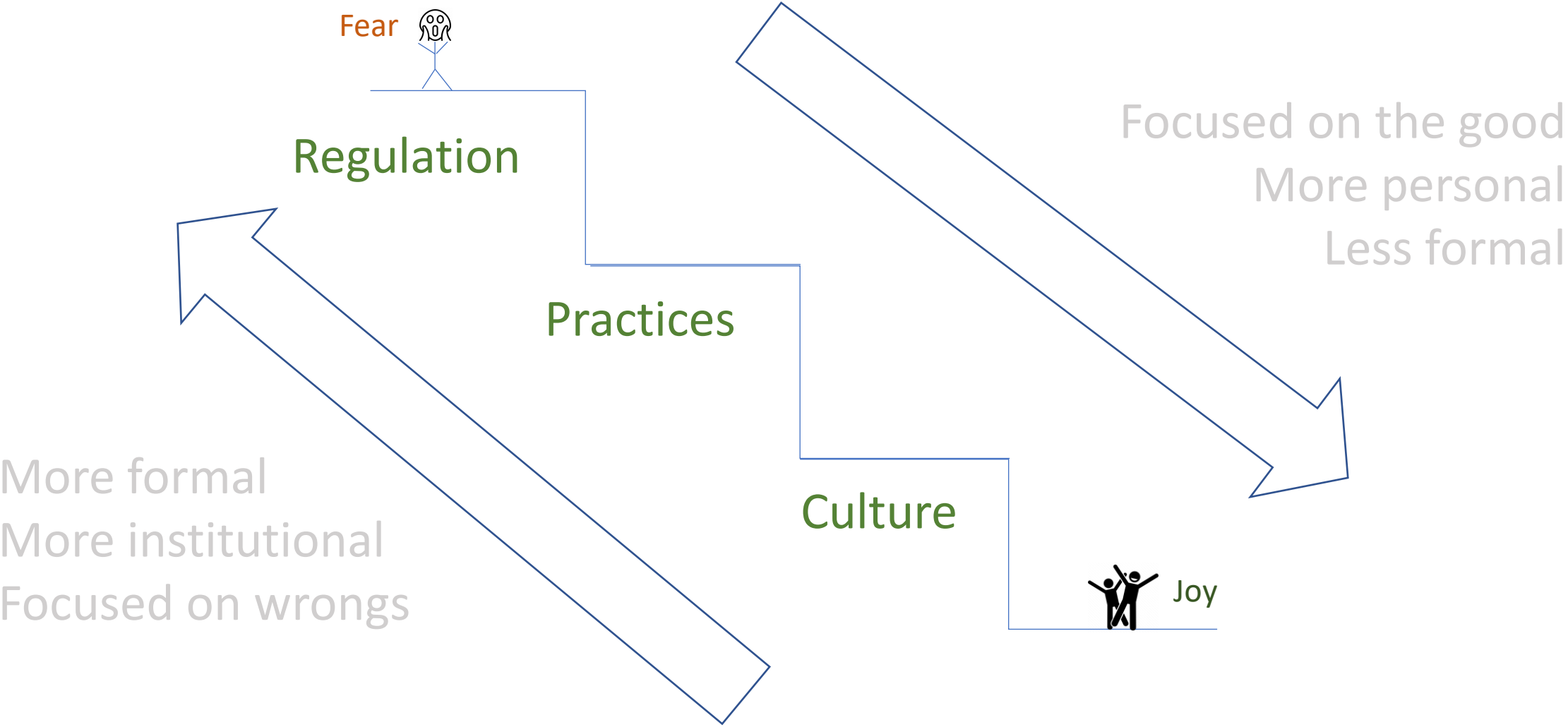
# The Fog of War

It is a truism that systems of rules and principles are compromised the moment they are applied in practice. A common expression, “the fog of war”, captures the uncertainty that results when complex real-life situations are encountered.



<https://www.everedgeglobal.com/news/2017-2-19-lifting-the-ip-fog-of-war/>

# Down the Staircase



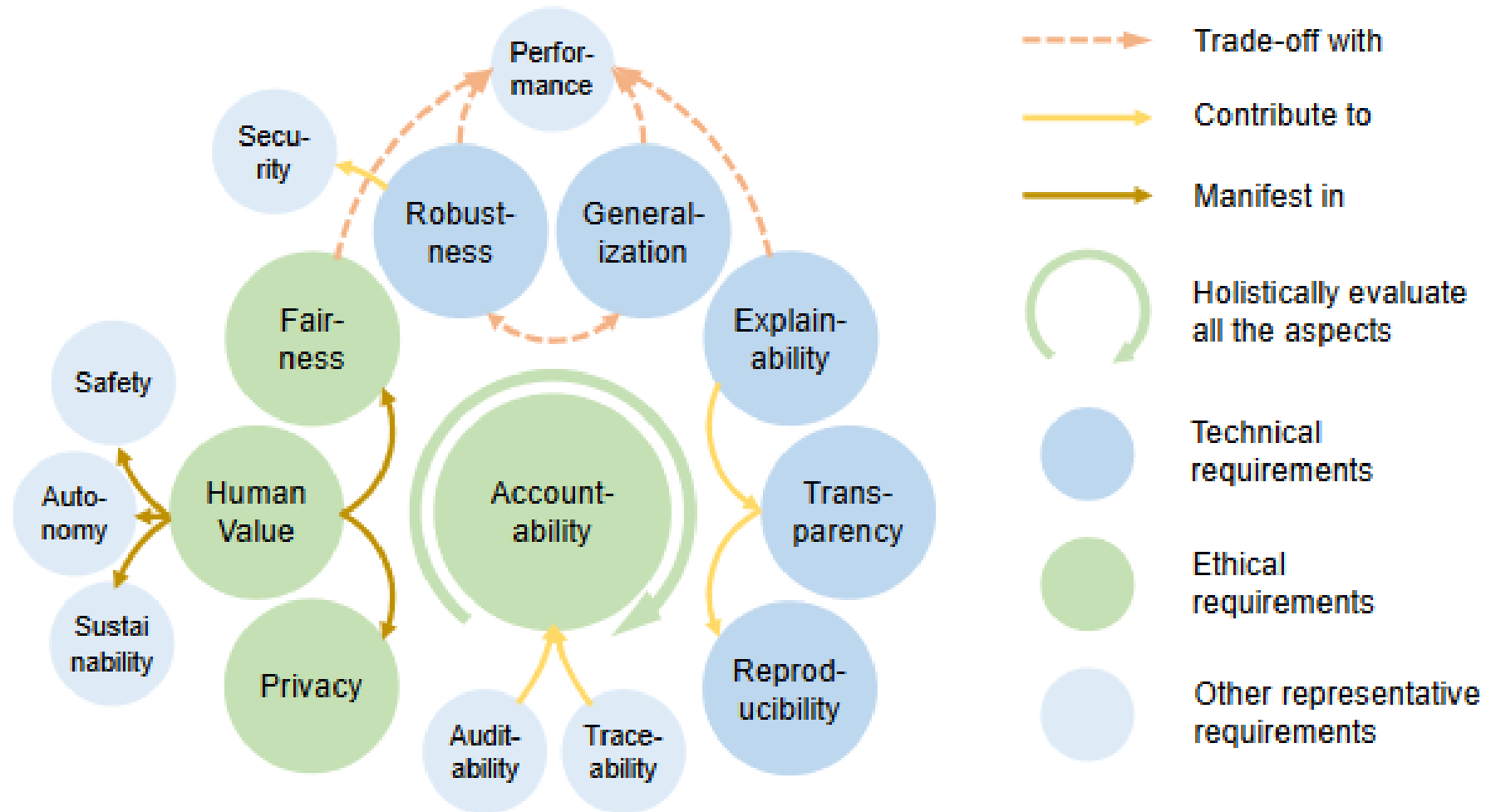
# Practices, Not Principles

Thus many approaches supporting professional conduct focus on common practices rather than principles. The idea is that while the actual outcome and best decision cannot be predicted, following a standard will lead to an optimal outcome in the given situation (Courtney, Lovallo & Clarke, 2013).



<https://sfmagazine.com/post-entry/november-2017-12-principles-of-best-practice-fpa/>

# The Elements of AI Practices



# Decision Trees



- poses a series of questions, user answers
- points to a recommended course of action.
- example, such a tree may ask:
  - whether an action is legal
  - whether it adds value
  - whether it is ethical. (Bagley, 20013)
- however, a decision tree is essentially an application of a set of rules or principles
  - we can see this through the processes used to generate decision trees (Azad-Manjiri, 2014)



# Checklists

- used in the management of complicated technology
  - flying an aircraft
  - performing surgery
- ensure that proponents do not omit essential steps or procedures
- in ethics, a checklist might be used to ask whether all ethical matters have been considered. (University of Leicester, 2019)
- they are not decision-making tools
  - they ensure completeness, but not accuracy.



# Frameworks

For more complex environments, a process-based approach is used, such as a management framework:

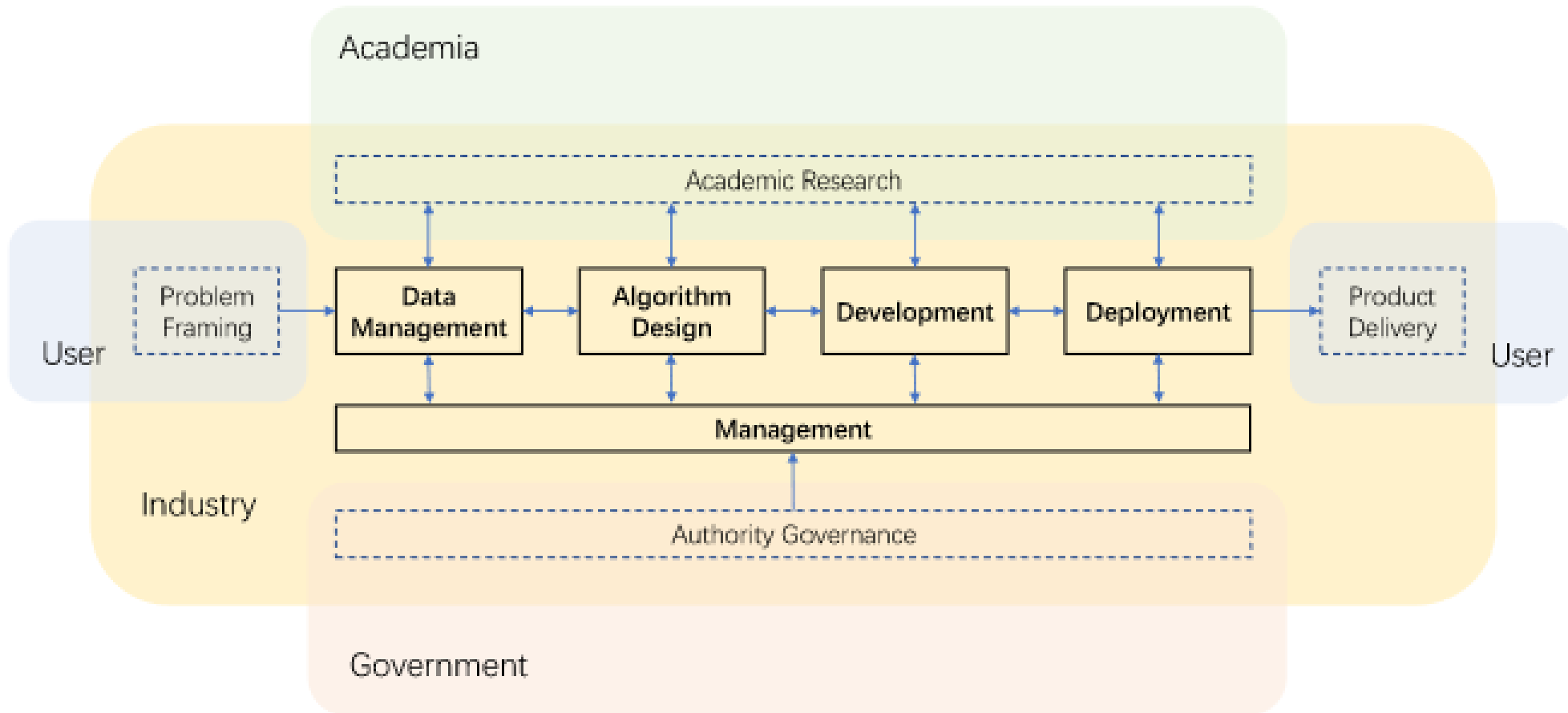
- identify the things that ought to be done
- name issues to be considered
- identify people involved in considering them
- note the resources to be consulted.

But the actual consideration, and the outcome of the consideration, is determined by the process.

“It’s the ability to organize thoughts into a formal framework that allows ethics to move forward instead of whirl around as a series of open-ended questions.”

Jessica Baron, <https://reillytop10.com/previous-lists/2020-list/the-corruption-of-tech-ethics/>

# Organizing Multidisciplinary Practitioners



The AI industry holds a connecting position to organize multidisciplinary practitioners, including users, academia, and government in the establishment of trustworthy AI.

<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2110.01167.pdf> p. 20



# Process

## Example: Fournier–Sylvester (2013) classroom conversation model:

1. Establish open respectful environment
2. Help students move beyond opinions and emotions
3. Help students learn to identify a weak argument (see Brown & Keeley, 2010)
4. Establish ground rules (see Oxfam, 2006)
5. Anticipate the social and political issues your students will find interesting and react to
6. Let all members have a voice
7. Decide on the role of the teacher:
  - a) Committed: Teacher expresses own view while attempting to be balanced
  - b) Objective or Academic: Teacher presents all possible viewpoints
  - c) Devil's Advocate: Teacher adopts most controversial viewpoints, forcing students to justify their own (see Wales & Clarke, 2005)
8. Close the discussion; evaluate and debrief.

# Process

## Example: Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists p.5

1. Identification of the individuals and groups potentially affected by the decision.
2. Identification of ethically relevant issues and practices, including the moral rights, values, well-being, best interests, cultural, social, historical, economic, institutional, legal or political context
3. Consideration of one's own biases, external pressures, personal needs, self-interest, or cultural, etc
4. Development of alternative courses of action.
5. Analysis of likely short-term, ongoing, and long-term risks and benefits of each course of action
6. Choice of course of action after conscientious application of existing principles, values, and standards
7. Action, with a commitment to assume responsibility for the consequences of the action.
8. Evaluation of the results of the course of action.
9. Assumption of responsibility for consequences of action.
10. Appropriate action, as warranted and feasible, to prevent future occurrences of the dilemma

# Some Types of Framework

- Management Framework for Ethics
- Data Governance Framework
- IT Governance Framework
- Human rights

