A highly effective public safety organization is one that produces an image of professionalism and a commitment to performing its responsibility to the community with the highest degree of integrity. Utilitarianism deals with total consequences in that it tries to maximize the positive and reduce the negative harm that can be done within the community.

Those who adhere to the rights approach believe that moral rights of individuals must be protected. Individuals have certain rights that provide them with choices in the way they live, within legal boundaries.

There are also those who subscribe to the fairness or justice approach, which states that all people should be treated equally: People are all equal under the law, and the actions they take should reflect that. However, in the event that some individuals are treated unequally in a given situation, the actions taken must be legally defensible. Those who abide by the common-good approach believe that, as a member of society, people should all act in a way that contributes to the welfare of the community as a whole. There are relationships that interact based on ethical reasoning and that show respect and compassion for all members. Common conditions are present that are essential to the welfare of others, such as the system of laws, effective public safety organizations, and so on.

Finally, there is the virtue approach, which is based on a set of values that are instilled in people during their formative years. Actions that people take should be consistent with these values. They are what shape people's character, especially as they relate to truth and honesty. Each of these approaches helps to determine what standards of behavior can be considered ethical. However, there are still problems to be addressed.

It should be noted that not everyone will be in agreement as to the best approach to take. People may have different perspectives on what constitutes the common good, even to the point of not necessarily coming to agreement on what is good and what is bad or about what would cause harm to others.

There is an additional concern that must be examined: The different approaches may not give a definitive answer to the question of what is ethical in the same way. However, each of the approaches identified at least provides people with some information that will help to determine how to act in a particular situation.
Any ethical decision-making model should incorporate the following:

- Clarify the issues prior to taking action. What is meant by this is that one must determine precisely what must be decided, formulate and devise all possible alternatives, and eliminate any illegal or unethical alternatives.
- Evaluate all the positive and negative consequences of your actions. Evaluate the facts and assumptions associated with any decision you make. Are your sources of information credible? Finally, what are the benefits, burdens, or risks to those involved in your decision?
- Decide on a course of action to be taken. What does your conscience tell you about your alternatives? What about worst-case scenarios? Finally, ask the following questions: Are you treating others as you would want to be treated in the same situation? Are you comfortable with your decision and the reasoning behind it? What if your children or other family members were observing your actions?
- Implement a plan of action. Have a plan, and be able to justify it to others, particularly those most affected by your decisions. Find ways that will provide the most benefits and least amount of risk, based on the actions you take in any given situation.

Hindsight is important to this process as well. Review and evaluate the results and effects of the decisions you make. Revise your thought process as needed, and be willing to take constructive criticism and integrate new thoughts regarding the actions that you have taken in a given situation.

Critical reasoning or thinking is the skill of being able to analyze situations and reason out the best decision to take. A major way to resolve a conflict of any sort is to look again at your goals and the values that define those goals. Properly defining the values of the profession will allow you to decide just which values have the greatest importance, on balance, in any situation you face, and this will permit you to make the hard decisions without being negatively influenced by doubt. Just because there is not always a way to reconcile competing viewpoints does not mean that it is impossible to make a decision. Refusing to make a decision is a kind of action, and you will be just as responsible for the consequences of that decision as for any other.

Putting ethical decision-making and critical-thinking skills into practice involves rules, attitudes, and skills that go into making one a professional. Professionalism makes a normative demand that public safety employees should consistently rise to meet the challenges of their work (Bowles,
Approaches to Ethical Decision Making

Collingridge, Curry, & Valentine, 2006).

Reference