



AN EXPOSITION OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

**Dr. A.
Subramanyamu**

Department Of Philosophy, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati - 517502

KEYWORDS :**1. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

A professional code of ethics states the principles and core values that are essential to the work of a particular occupational group. Practitioners in many professions subscribe to a code ethics that governs their behaviour. Most codes of ethics created professional organizations have two main parts.

- i. The first outlines what the professional organization aspires to become,
- ii. The second typically lists rules and principles by which members of the organization are expected to abide.

Many codes also include a commitment to continuing education for those who practice the profession. Laws do not provide a complete guide to ethical behaviour. Just because an activity is not defined as illegal does not mean it is ethical. You also cannot expect a professional code of ethics to provide the complete answer. No code can be the definitive collection of behavioural standards. However, practicing according to a professional code of ethics can produce many benefits for the individual, the profession, and society as whole:

- a. Improves ethical decision making: Adherence to a professional code of ethics means that practitioners use a common set of core values and beliefs to serve as a guideline for ethical decision making.
- b. Promotes high standards of practice and ethical behaviour: Adherence to a code of ethics reminds professionals of the responsibilities and duties that they may be tempted to compromise to meet the pressures of day-to-day business, the code also defines behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable to guide professionals in their interactions with others. Strong codes of ethics have procedures for censuring professionals for serious violations, with penalties that can include the loss of the right to practice.
- c. Enhances trust and respect from the general public: Public trust is built on the expectation that a professional will behave ethically. People often must depend on the integrity and good judgment of a professional to tell the truth, abstain from giving self-serving advice, and offer warnings about the potential negative side effects of their actions. Thus, adherence to a code of ethics enhances trust and respect of professionals and their profession.
- d. Provides an evaluation benchmark: A code of ethics provides an evaluation benchmarks that a professional, can use as a means of self-assessment. Peers of the professional can also use the code for recognition or censure.

Let us examine ethics relating to professionals like - Business, Health care and Information Technology.

2. BUSINESS ETHICS

Risk is the product of multiplying the likelihood of an event by the impact of its occurrence. Thus, if the likelihood of an event is high and its potential negative impact is large, the risk is considered great. Ethics has risen to the top of business agendas because the risks associated with inappropriate behaviour have increased, both in their likelihood and their potential negative impact.

Several corporate trends have increased the likelihood of unethical behaviour. First, greater globalization has created as much more complex work environment that spans diverse societies and cultures, making it much more difficult to apply principles and codes of ethics consistently.

Employees, shareholders, and regulatory agencies are increasingly sensitive to violations of accounting standards, failures to disclose substantial changes in business conditions to investors, non-conformance with required health and safety practices, and production of unsafe or substandard products. Such heightened vigilance raises the risk of financial loss for businesses that do not foster ethical practices or run afoul of required standards.

Fostering good business ethics is important. Corporations have at least five reasons for promoting a work environment in which they encourage employees to act ethically when making business decisions:

- i. To gain the goodwill of the community: Although organizations exit primarily to earn profits or provide services to customers, they also have some basic responsibilities to society. Many corporations recognize these responsibilities and make a serious effort to fulfil them. The goodwill that socially responsible activities create can make it easier for corporation to conduct their business. For example, a company known for treating its employees well will find it easier to complete for the best jobs candidates. On the other hand, companies viewed as harmful to their community may suffer a disadvantage.
- ii. To create an organization that operates consistently: Organizations develop and abide by values to create a consistent approach that meets the needs of their stake-holder share-holders, employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. Although each company's value system is different, many share the following values: Operate with honesty and integrity, staying true to corporate principles; Operate according to standards of ethical conduct, in words and action; Treat colleagues, customers, and consumers with respect; Strive to be the best at what matters most to the company; Accept personal responsibility for actions; Value diversity; and Make decisions based on facts and principles.
- iii. To produce good business: In many cases, good ethics can mean good business and improved profits. Companies that produce safe and effective products avoid costly recalls and law-suits. Companies that provide excellent service maintain their customers instead of losing them to competitors. Companies that develop and maintain strong employee relations suffer less turnover and enjoy better employee morale. Suppliers and other business partners often prefer to work with companies that operate in a fair and ethical manner. Likewise, bad ethics can lead to bad business results.
- iv. To protect the organization and its employees from legal action: Some companies are motivated to build a strong ethics program to avoid negative publicity. If an organization is perceived as operating ethically, customers, business partners, shareholders, consumer advocates, financial institutions, and regulatory bodies will regard it more favourably. Companies that operate unethically often suffer negative consequences and bad publicity. The risks of unethical behaviour are increasing. So the improvement of business ethics is becoming more important.
- v. To avoid unfavourable publicity: The code of ethics should focus employees on areas of ethical risk relating to their role in the organization, provide guidance to help them recognize and deal with ethical issues and provide mechanisms for reporting unethical conduct and fostering a culture of honesty and accountability in an organization. The code of ethics helps ensure to that employees abide by the law, follow necessary regulations, and behave in an ethical manner.

3. MEDICAL ETHICS

As a scholarly discipline, medical ethics encompasses its practical

application in clinical settings as well as work on its history, philosophy, and sociology. A common framework used in the analysis of medical ethics is the 'four principle' approach postulated by Tom Beauchamp and James Childress in their textbook *Principles of biomedical ethics*. It recognizes four basic moral principles, which are to be judged and weighed against each other, with attention given to the scope of their application. The four principles are¹: i. Respect for autonomy the patient has the right to refuse or choose their treatment, ii. Beneficence is practitioner should act in the best interest of the patient, iii. Non- malfeasance 'first, does no harm', and iv. Justice concerns the distribution of scarce health resources, and the decision of who gets what treatment.

When moral values are in conflict, the result may be an ethical dilemma or crisis. Sometimes, no good solution to a dilemma in medical ethics exists, and, on occasion, the values of the medical community conflict with the values of the individual patient, family, or larger nonmedical community. Conflicts can also arise between health care providers, or among family members.

In applying and advancing scientific knowledge, medical practice and associated technologies, human vulnerability should be taken into account. Individuals and groups of special vulnerability should be protected and the personal integrity of such individuals respected².

In some countries such as the Netherlands, Euthanasia is an accepted medical practice. Legal regulations assign this to the medical profession. In such nations, the aim is to alleviate the suffering of patients from diseases known to be incurable by the methods known in that culture.

The assignment of philosophers or religious clerics will reflect the importance attached by the society to the based values involved. Some cultures do not place a great emphasis on informing the patient of the diagnosis, especially when cancer is the diagnosis. The WMA International Code of Medical Ethics explicitly states, "A physician shall...report to the appropriate authorities those physicians who practice unethically or incompetently or who engage in fraud or deception"³. Many doctors treat their family members. Doctors who do so must be vigilant not to create conflicts of interest or treat inappropriately⁴.

4. ETHICS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The growth of the Internet, the ability to capture and store vast amounts of personal data online, and greater reliance on information systems in all aspects of life have increased the risk of using information technology unethically. The importance of ethics and human values has been underemphasized with a range of consequences.

- i. Here are some examples that raise public concern about the ethical use of information technology: Today's workers might have their e-mail and Internet access monitored while at work, as employers struggle to balance their need to manage important company assets and work time with employees desire for privacy and self-direction. Millions of people have used peer-to-peer networks to download music and movies at no charge and in apparent violation of copy-right laws. Organizations contact millions of people world-wide through unsolicited e-mail (spam) at an extremely low cost. Hackers break into data-bases of financial institutions and steal customer information, then use it to commit identity theft, opening new accounts and charging purchases to unsuspecting victims. Web sites plant cookies or spyware on visitor's hard drivers to track their Internet activity.
- ii. Two fundamental tenets: a). The general public has not realized the critical importance of ethics as they apply to IT; too much emphasis has been placed on the technical issues. IT professionals need to recognize this fact when they formulate policies that will affect the well-being of millions of consumers and have legal ramifications; b). In the corporate world, important technical decisions are often left to the technical experts. General business managers must assume greater responsibility for these decisions, but to do so they must be able to make broad-minded, objective, ethical decisions based on technical savvy, business know-how, and a sense of ethics. They must also try to create a working environment in which ethical dilemmas can be discussed openly, objectively, and constructively.
- iii. Common Ethical Issues for IT Users: Software Piracy; Inappropriate Use of Computing Resources; and Inappropriate Sharing of Information.

Companies can take several of the following actions when creating an IT usage policy: Defining and limiting the Appropriate Use of it Resources; Establishing Guidelines for Use of Company Software; Structuring Information Systems to Protect Data and Information; and Installing and Maintaining a Corporate Firewall.

5. CONCLUSION

Professionals require advanced training and experience, they must exercise discretion and judgment in the course of their work and their work cannot be standardized. A professional is expected to contribute to society, to participate in a life-long training program, to keep abreast of developments in the field, and to help develop other professionals. From a legal standpoint, a professional has passed the state licensing requirements (if they exist) and earned the right to practice there.

IT professionals typically become involved in many different relationships, each with its own set of ethical issues and potential problems. In relationships between IT Professionals and employers, important issues include setting and enforcing policies regarding the ethical use of IT, the potential for whistle-blowing, and the safeguarding of trade secrets. In relationships between IT professionals and clients, the key issues revolve around defining, sharing, and fulfilling each party's responsibilities for successfully completing an IT project. A major goal for IT professionals and suppliers is to develop good working relationships which no action can be perceived as unethical. In relationships between fellow IT professionals, the key issues are to improve the profession through such activities as mentoring inexperienced colleagues and demonstrating professional loyalty. When it comes to the relationship between IT professionals and society at large, the main challenge is to practice the profession in ways that cause no harm to society and provide significant benefits.

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