**WHAT IS ETHICS**? Ethics is the science of conduct. It considers the actions of human beings with reference to their rightness or wrongness. The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek word ethos, which means "character". Mackenzie defines ethics as ―the study of what is right or good in human conduct‖ or ―the science of the ideal involved in conduct‖. It is a branch of philosophy, specially the moral philosophy that studies the evolution of concepts; such as right or wrong behaviour. So, it is clear that ethics is the study which determines rightness or wrongness of actions.

Ethics then, we may say, discusses men‘s habits or customs, or in other words their characters, the principles on which the habitually act and considers what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of these principles, the good or evil of these habits. Ethics is the word that refers to morals, values, and beliefs of the individuals, family or the society. The word has several meanings.

First, it is an activity and process of inquiry.

Second, it is different from non-moral problems, when dealing with issues and controversies.

Third, ethics refers to a particular set of beliefs, attitudes, and habits of individuals or family or groups concerned with morals.

Fourth, it is used to mean ‗morally correct‘.

**Need of studying ethics** The study on ethics helps to know the people‘s beliefs, values, and morals, learn the good and bad of them, and practice them to maximize their well-being and happiness. It involves the inquiry on the existing situations, form judgments and resolve the issues. In addition, ethics tells us how to live, to respond to issues, through the duties, rights, responsibilities, and obligations. In religion, similar principles are included, but the reasoning on procedures is limited. The principles and practices of religions have varied from to time to time (history), region (geography, climatic conditions), religion, society, language, caste and creed. But ethics has grown to a large extent beyond the barriers listed above. In ethics, the focus is to study and apply the principles and practices, universally.

**Professional ethics**: Professional ethics are those values and principles that are introduced to an individual in a professional organization. Each employee is meant to strictly follow these principles. They do not have a choice. Also, this approach is imperative in professional settings as it brings a sense of discipline in people as well as helps maintain decorum in offices. Some examples may include confidentiality, fairness, transparency and proficiency. These ethics make employees responsible.

Industry and Society are the two systems which interact with each other and are interdependent. Society requires industry/business system which provides manufacturing, distribution and consumption activities. It needs investment (capital input), labor (input), supply (raw materials), production (industries, business organizations), marketing and distribution (transport), and consumption (public, customer). A lot of transactions (and interactions) between these sub-systems involving people are needed for the welfare of the society. It is here, the work ethics plays an essential role.

Professional ethics is defined as a set of attitudes concerned with the value of work, which forms the motivational orientation. The professional ethics‘ is aimed at ensuring the followings.

* Economy (get job, create wealth, earn salary),
* Productivity (wealth, profit),
* safety (in workplace),
* Health and hygiene (working conditions),
* Privacy (raise family),
* Security (permanence against contractual, pension, and retirement benefits),
* Cultural and social development (leisure, hobby, and happiness),
* Welfare (social work),
* Environment (anti-pollution activities),

All above offer opportunities for all, according to their abilities, but without discrimination.

**Features/ characteristics of professional ethics:**

* Openness
* Transparency
* privacy
* Impartial
* Practical and un-biased
* Loyal
* Co-operative
* Objective oriented

**Types of professional ethics:**

1. Meta ethics: (origin of ethical principle) It deals with origin of ethical principles that govern the specification of right and wrong behaviour. A major issue of debate in this category is whether ethical principles are eternal truths that evolved from a spiritual world or simply created by the humans.

2. Descriptive ethics: (moral beliefs) It refers to the study of moral beliefs of the people. It is a field of empirical research into what people or societies consider right or wrong.

3. Normative ethics: (self moral conduct) It is concerned with arriving at set of moral conduct rules against which behaviour are judged.

4. Applied ethics: The ethical principles are designed or written for implementation in a specific situation. a. Bio ethics: These are the ethical principles or codes for maintaining normal livelihood. b. Medical ethics: The ethical principles or codes designed for a medical profession. c. Computer ethics: The ethical principles or codes designed for a medical profession. d. Engineering ethics: The ethical principles or codes designed for an engineering profession. e. Business ethics: The ethical principles or codes designed for a business operation f. Legal ethics: The ethical principles or codes designed for maintaining a legal system.

PERSONAL ETHICS: Personal ethics refer to a person‘s personal or self-created values and codes of conduct. From the very beginning, these ethics are instilled in an individual, with a large part having been played by their parents, friends, and family. Common examples may include honesty, openness, commitment, unbiased behavior, and sense of responsibility. What a person develops regarding fairness or learns during childhood remains with him all through his life and is reflected by his actions and words. No matter if he is talking to a friend or his relatives or an elderly, his ethics would be clear from what he says and how he says it. A person‘s personal ethics are revealed in a professional situation through his behavior. Features of Personal Ethics:

* Refrain from causing harm to others
* Be benevolent or good to others
* Be a well-wisher to others
* Respect individual freedom
* Ensure justice to all, without discrimination
* Respect law and code of conduct
* Follow noble practices like honesty, integrity, truthfulness etc.
* Free and fair to all
* Practice non-violence
* Help the people in need
* Help the poor.

Personal vs. Professional Ethics: What‘s the difference between personal and professional ethics? The ethics that you adhere to in your personal life and those that you comply with in your professional life are different in certain aspects. Without certain ethics, human beings would be incomplete and shallow. Thus, they have different systems of ethics in different places.

The biggest difference between personal and professional codes of conduct is perhaps the strictness with which people conform to them. The values that you define for yourself are up to you to be followed or not to be followed. However, those defined in a company or by a profession must be followed by you, since breach of these principles or rules may harm your reputation and status. But if you do not adhere to your personal ethics, it might hardly make a difference, depending on the circumstances. Even then, you must keep in mind that violation of your own rules may harm others around you.

Comparison Chart:

Personal Ethics Professional Ethics Includes your personal values and moral Rules imposed on an employee in a company, or as member of qualities. a profession, e.g. doctor or lawyer. Incorporated by family, friends and Learnt when you are a part of a professional setting or when surroundings since your childhood. you are being trained or educated for working there.

Examples: honesty, care, and sincerity.

Examples: no gossiping, time management, punctuality,

confidentiality, transparency. Not conforming to these may harm or Not adhering to these may harm your professional reputation. hurt others. Your personal needs are satisfied by Your professional needs are satisfied by following these. following these.

MORALS: Morals are the welfare principles enunciated by the wise people, based on their experience and wisdom. They were edited, changed or modified or evolved to suit the geography of the region, rulers (dynasty), and in accordance with development of knowledge in science and technology and with time. Morality is concerned with principles and practices of morals such as: (a) What ought or ought not to be done in a given situation? (b) What is right or wrong about the handling of a situation? And (c) What is good or bad about the people, policies, and ideals involved? Morality is different from Ethics in the following ways:

VALUES: Humans have the unique ability to define their identity, choose their values and establish their beliefs. All three of these directly influence a person‘s behavior. People have gone to great lengths to demonstrate the validity of their beliefs, including war and sacrificing their own life! Conversely, people are not motivated to support or validate the beliefs of another, when those beliefs are contrary to their own. People will act congruent with their personal values or what they deem to be important.

A value is defined as a principle that promotes well-being or prevents harm. Another definition is: ―Values are our guidelines for our success—our paradigm about what is acceptable.” Personal values are defined as: ―Emotional beliefs in principles regarded as particularly favorable or important for the individual.” Our values associate emotions to our experiences and guide our choices, decisions and actions.

**Ethics v/s morals**

**Ethics** and **morals** relate to “right” and “wrong” conduct. While they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different: **ethics** refer to rules provided by an external source, e.g., codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions. **Morals** refer to an individual’s own principles regarding right and wrong.

**Comparison chart**

| Ethics versus Morals comparison chart | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Ethics** | **Morals** |
| **What are they?** | The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group or culture. | Principles or habits with respect to right or wrong conduct. While morals also prescribe dos and don'ts, morality is ultimately a personal compass of right and wrong. |
| **Where do they come from?** | Social system – External | Individual - Internal |
| **Why we do it?** | Because society says it is the right thing to do. | Because we believe in something being right or wrong. |
| **Flexibility** | Ethics are dependent on others for definition. They tend to be consistent within a certain context, but can vary between contexts. | Usually consistent, although can change if an individual’s beliefs change. |
| **The "Gray"** | A person strictly following Ethical Principles may not have any Morals at all. Likewise, one could violate Ethical Principles within a given system of rules in order to maintain Moral integrity. | A Moral Person although perhaps bound by a higher covenant, may choose to follow a code of ethics as it would apply to a system. "Make it fit" |
| **Origin** | Greek word "ethos" meaning"character" | Latin word "mos" meaning "custom" |
| **Acceptability** | Ethics are governed by professional and legal guidelines within a particular time and place | Morality transcends cultural norms |

**Source of Principles**

Ethics are external standards that are provided by institutions, groups, or [culture](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Ethnicity_vs_Race) to which an individual belongs. For example, lawyers, policemen, and doctors all have to follow an ethical code laid down by their profession, regardless of [their](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Their_vs_There) own feelings or preferences. Ethics can also be considered a social system or a framework for acceptable behavior.

Morals are also influenced by culture or society, but they are personal [principles](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Principal_vs_Principle) created and upheld by individuals themselves.

**Consistency and Flexibility**

Ethics are very consistent within a certain context, but can vary greatly between contexts. [For example](https://www.diffen.com/difference/e.g._vs_i.e.), the ethics of the medical [profession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profession) in the 21st century are generally consistent and do not change from hospital to hospital, but they are different from the ethics of the 21st century legal profession.

An individual’s moral code is usually unchanging and consistent across all contexts, but it is also possible for certain events to radically change an individual's personal beliefs and values.

**Conflicts Between Ethics and Morals**

[](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Image:312a15.jpg)

One professional example of ethics conflicting with morals is the work of a defense attorney. A lawyer’s morals may tell her that [murder](https://www.diffen.com/difference/First_Degree_Murder_vs_Second_Degree_Murder) is reprehensible and that murderers should be punished, but her ethics as a professional lawyer, require her to defend her client to the best of her abilities, *even if she knows that the client is guilty*.

Another example can be found in the medical field. In most parts of the world, a doctor may not euthanize a patient, even at the patient's request, as per ethical standards for health professionals. However, the same doctor may *personally* believe in a patient's right to die, as per the doctor's own morality.

**Origins**

Much of the confusion between these two words can be traced back to their origins. For example, the word "ethic" comes from Old French (*etique*), Late Latin (*ethica*), and Greek (*ethos*) and referred to customs or moral philosophies. "Morals" comes from Late Latin's *moralis*, which referred to appropriate behavior and manners in society. So, the two have very similar, if not synonymous, meanings originally.

Morality and ethics of the individual have been [philosophically studied](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Aristotle_vs_Plato) for well over a thousand years. The idea of ethics being principles that are set and applied to a group (not necessarily focused on the individual) is relatively new, though, primarily dating back to the 1600s.

# Difference Between Ethics and Values

[](https://keydifferences.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/values-vs-ethics2.jpg)Ethics and Values together lay the foundation for sustainability. While they are sometimes used synonymously, they are different, wherein**ethics** are the set of rules that govern the behaviour of a person, established by a group or culture. **Values** refer to the beliefs for which a person has an enduring preference.

Ethics and values are important in every aspect of life, when we have to make a choice between two things, wherein ethics determine what is right, values determine what is important.

Definition of Ethics

By the term ‘ethics’ we mean a branch of moral philosophy – a sense of rightness or wrongness of actions, motives and the results of these actions. In short, it is a discipline that identifies good or evil, just or unjust, fair or unfair practices, about moral duty. It is well-based standards that a person should do, concerning rights, obligations, fairness, benefits to society and so on. The standard puts a reasonable obligation to stop crime like stealing, assault, rape, murder, fraud and so on.

The system addresses the questions of the human morality, such as What should be a standard way for people to live? Or What are the appropriate actions in the given situations? What should be an ideal human conduct? etc. Under Ethics there are four important subject areas of study:

* **Meta-ethics**: Ethical philosophy that analyses the meaning and scope of moral values.
* **Descriptive ethics**: The branch of ethics that deals with psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.
* **Normative Ethics**: The study of the moral course of action through practical means.
* **Applied ethics**: This branch tells us how we can achieve moral outcomes, in a particular circumstance.

### Definition of Values

Values refer to the important and enduring beliefs or principles, based on which an individual makes judgements in life. It is at the centre of our lives which act as a standard of behaviour. They severely affect the emotional state of mind of an individual. They can be personal values, cultural values or corporate values.

Values are forces that cause an individual to behave in a particular manner. It sets our priorities in life, i.e. what we consider in the first place. It is a reason behind the choices we make. It reflects what is more important for us. So, if we are true to our values and make our choices accordingly, then the way we live to express our core values. Moreover, if you understand an individual’s values, you can easily identify what is important for them.

In the world of intense competition, every business entity work on certain principles and beliefs which are nothing but the values. Likewise, ethics is implemented in the organisation to ensure the protection of the interest of stakeholders like customers, suppliers, employees, society and government. Read the following article to know the important differences between ethics and values.

## Ethics Vs Values

### Comparison Chart

| **BASIS FOR COMPARISON** | **ETHICS** | **VALUES** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Meaning | Ethics refers to the guidelines for conduct, that address question about morality. | Value is defined as the principles and ideals, that helps them in making judgement of what is more important. |
| What are they? | System of moral principles. | Stimuli for thinking. |
| Consistency | Uniform | Differs from person to person |
| Tells | What is morally correct or incorrect, in the given situation. | What we want to do or achieve. |
| Determines | Extent of rightness or wrongness of our options. | Level of importance. |
| What it does? | Constrains | Motivates |

### Conclusion

While ethics are consistently applied over the period, and remains same for all the human beings. Values have an individualistic approach, i.e. it varies from person to person but remains stable, relatively unchanging, but they can be changed over time due to a significant emotional event.

**Components of Moral Action**

There are a number of models of ethical decision making and action. For example, business ethics educators Charles Powers and David Vogel identify six factors or elements that underlie moral reasoning and behavior and that are particularly relevant in organizational settings.1 The first is moral imagination, the recognition that even routine choices and relationships have an ethical dimension. The second is moral identification and ordering, which, as the name suggests, refers to the ability to identify important issues, determine priorities, and sort out competing values. The third factor is moral evaluation, or using analytical skills to evaluate options. The fourth element is tolerating moral disagreement and ambiguity, which arises when managers disagree about values and courses of action. The fifth is the ability to integrate managerial competence with moral competence. This integration involves anticipating possible ethical dilemmas, leading others in ethical decision making, and making sure any decision becomes part of an organization’s systems and procedures. The sixth and final element is a sense of moral obligation, which serves as a motivating force to engage in moral judgment and to implement decisions. James Rest of the University of Minnesota developed what may be the most widely used model of moral behavior. Rest built his four-component model by working backward. He started with the end product—moral action—and then determined the steps that produce such behavior. He concluded that ethical action is the result of four psychological subprocesses: (1) moral sensitivity (recognition), (2) moral judgment, (3) moral focus (motivation), and (4) moral character.2

Component 1: Moral Sensitivity (Recognition) Moral sensitivity (recognizing the presence of an ethical issue) is the first step in ethical decision making because we can’t solve a moral problem unless we first know that one exists. A great many moral failures stem from ethical insensitivity, we can take steps to enhance our ethical sensitivity (and the sensitivity of our fellow leaders and followers) by doing the following:

• Active listening and role playing • Imagining other perspectives • Stepping back from a situation to determine whether it has moral implications • Using moral terminology to discuss problems and issues • Avoiding euphemisms • Refusing to excuse misbehavior • Accepting personal responsibility • Practicing humility and openness to other points of view.

Component 2: Moral Judgment Once an ethical problem is identified, decision makers select a course of action from the options generated in Component 1. In other words, they make judgments about what is the right or wrong thing to do in this situation. Moral judgment has generated more research than the other components of Rest’s model. Investigators have been particularly interested in cognitive moral development, the process by which people develop their moral reasoning abilities over time. Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg argued that individuals progress through a series of moral stages just as they do physical ones.9 Each stage is more advanced than the one before. Not only do people engage in more complex reasoning as they progress up the stages, but they also become less self-centered and develop broader definitions of morality.

Component 3: Moral Focus (Motivation) After concluding what course of action is best, decision makers must be focused (motivated to follow through) on their choices. Moral values often conflict with other significant values. For instance, an accounting supervisor who wants to blow the whistle on illegal accounting practices at her firm must balance her desire to do the right thing against her desire to keep her job, provide income for her family, and maintain relationships with her fellow workers. She will report the accounting abuses to outside authorities only if moral considerations take precedence over these competing priorities. Psychologists report that self-interest and hypocrisy undermine moral motivation.14 Sometimes individuals genuinely want to do the right thing, but their integrity is “overpowered” when they discover that they will have to pay a personal cost for acting in an ethical manner. Others never intend to follow an ethical course of action but engage in moral hypocrisy instead. These decision makers “want to appear moral while, if possible, avoiding the cost of actually being moral.”

Component 4: Moral Character Executing the plan of action takes character. Moral agents have to overcome opposition, resist distractions, cope with fatigue, and develop tactics and strategies for reaching their goals. This helps explain why there is only a moderate correlation between moral judgment and moral behavior. Many times deciding does not lead to doing.

**CODES OF ETHICS**

The ‘codes of ethics’ exhibit, rights, duties, and obligations of the members of a profession and a professional society. The codes exhibit the following essential roles:

1. Inspiration and guidance. The codes express the collective commitment of the profession to ethical conduct and public good and thus inspire the individuals. They identify primary responsibilities and provide statements and guidelines on interpretations for the professionals and the professional societies.

2. Support to professional . The codes give positive support to professionals for taking stands on moral issues. Further they serve as potential legal support to discharge professional obligations.

3. Deterrence (discourage to act immorally) and discipline (regulate to act morally). The codes serve as the basis for investigating unethical actions. The professional societies sometimes revoke membership or suspend/expel the members, when proved to have acted unethical. This sanction along with loss of respect from the colleagues and the society are bound to act as deterrent.

4. Education and mutual understanding. Codes are used to prompt discussion and reflection on moral issues. They develop a shared understanding by the professionals, public, and the government on the moral responsibilities of the professionals. The Board of Review of the professional societies encourages moral discussion for educational purposes.

5. Create good public image. The codes present positive image of the committed profession to the public, help the professional to serve the public effectively. They promote more of self regulation and lessen the government regulations. This is bound to raise the reputation of the profession and the organization, in establishing the trust of the public.

6. Protect the status quo. They create minimum level of ethical conduct and promotes agreement within the profession. Primary obligation namely the safety, health, and welfare of the public, declared by the codes serves and protects the public.

7. Promotes business interests. The codes offer inspiration to the entrepreneurs, establish shared standards, healthy competition, and maximize profit to investors, employees, and consumers.

**Limitations**: The codes are not remedy for all evils. They have many limitations, namely:

1. General and vague wordings. Many statements are general in nature and hence unable to solve all problems.

2. Not applicable to all situations. Codes are not sacred, and need not be accepted without criticism. Tolerance for criticisms of the codes themselves should be allowed.

3. Often have internal conflicts. Many times, the priorities are clearly spelt out, e.g., codes forbid public remarks critical of colleagues (engineers), but they actually discovered a major bribery, which might have caused a huge loss to the exchequer.

4. They can not be treated as final moral authority for professional conduct. Codes have flaws by commission and omission. There are still some grey areas undefined by codes. They can not be equated to laws. After all, even laws have loopholes and they invoke creativity in the legal practitioners.

5. Only a few enroll as members in professional society and non-members can not be compelled.

6. Even as members of the professional society, many are unaware of the codes

7. Different societies have different codes. The codes can not be uniform or same! Unifying the codes may not necessarily solve the problems prevailing various professions, but attempts are still made towards this unified codes.

8. Codes are said to be coercive. They are sometimes claimed to be threatening and forceful.

# Types of Ethical Practices Employees Adhere to in the Workplace

As a result of its unethical sales practices, Wells Fargo recently agreed to pay $480 million dollars to settle a class action suit. Allegations continue to surface against the company that could cost Wells Fargo up to a billion dollars in fines. To say that ethical practices are important, is a no-brainer. But how do you determine the ethical practices that you want your employees to adhere to?

## Start With What You Stand For

Whether you sell widgets, advice or services, your company has a mission. You don’t have to formalize it in an official mission statement, but there’s a reason why you do what you do and the way you do it. And it’s not just to make money. Pass your core reason for being onto your employees and they’ll understand the ethical leanings of your business, and the rules they’re expected to follow.

## Obey the Law

At its most minimum level, ethical practices must adhere to the laws of governmental bodies. Your employees can’t steal from you or from other employees. They can’t harm others. And unlike, those employees at Wells Fargo, they can't blatantly misrepresent products and services. The best employees behave ethically in and out of work, and as an employer, there are areas where you can actually tell them what to do.

For example, you may subject employees to tests for illicit drug use or have a code of conduct that would terminate an employee convicted of domestic violence.

## Be Honest, Have Integrity

It’s not against the law to lie, but you want honest employees of the highest integrity working for you. When you can trust employees to do what they say they will, it offloads oversight and allows you to concentrate on bigger picture issues. Honesty is also an important tenet for your employees to pass along to your customers. When they promise 500 widgets delivered on July 21, they shouldn’t deliver 480 on July 22. Sure, there are times when you’ll fall behind with orders, but if you handle those blips with integrity, you’re more apt to develop and keep loyal customers.

## Respect Coworkers and Clients

Employee handbooks often include very specific instructions about what are and are not ethical behaviors. Particularly in an era of heightened awareness about sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace, tantamount among sound ethical practices is the need for mutual respect. Your employees should never feel unsafe or demeaned. Respect for others starts at the top but it should also be crystal clear to employees what the expectations are for civil discourse and behaviors at work.

## Honor Proprietary Information

Many employees are required to sign contracts that prohibit them from sharing the intellectual property and practices of their employers. Even if it’s not codified, though, sound ethical practice means that employees don’t give your company’s secrets away – especially not to competitors.

## Avoid Conflict of Interest

Employees may need to recuse themselves from contracts when they know the people at the other end of the deal. Or, if you have rules about hiring family, they’ll need to explain the connection before you make the hire. It’s about being open, honest and honorable. And a good first step in that direction is for employees to disclose connections that might influence their work or behavior.