

B V M Engineering College

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UNIT-1 Professional Ethics

Definition of Ethics, Professional Ethics, Business Ethics, Corporate Ethics, Engineering Ethics

Personal Ethics; Profession, Professionalism, Professional Responsibility

Professional Ethics; Conflict of Interest, Gift v/s Bribery, Environmental breaches, Negligence, Deficiencies in state of-the-art; Vigil Mechanism, Whistle blowing, protected disclosures

What is Ethics?

Ethics refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with moral principles and values governing human behaviour. It explores questions about what is right or wrong, good or bad, and how individuals should act in various situations. Ethics provides a framework for understanding and evaluating the principles and beliefs that guide human conduct, as well as the consequences of those actions. Ethics deals with such questions at all levels. Its subject consists of the fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong.

Ethical systems often involve theories and principles that help individuals and societies determine what is morally acceptable or desirable. These theories can vary across cultures and philosophical traditions, but they generally aim to address questions of fairness, justice, honesty, integrity, and responsibility.

Ethics – Definition and Characteristics

“Ethics is the science of judging specifically human ends and the relationship of means to those ends. In some way it is also the art of controlling means so that they will serve human ends.” — **Thomas Garret**

“‘Ethics’ is the discipline that examines one’s moral standard or moral standards of society. It asks how those standards apply to our life and whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable — that is, whether these are supported by good reason or poor one.” — **Manuel G. Velasquez**

“Ethics refer to a set of moral principles which should play a very significant role in guiding the conduct of managers and employees in the operation of any enterprise.” — **Dale S. Beach**

“Ethics is that discipline which deals with what is good and bad and also deal with moral duty and obligation. Ethics are set of moral principles or values.” — **Carol Buchholtz**

“Ethics is a conception of right and wrong conduct. Ethics tell us when our behaviour is moral and when it is moral. Ethics deal with fundamental human relationship how we think and behave towards others and how we want them to think and behave towards us.” — **Post, Frederick, and Lawrence**

“Ethics are formalised principles derived from social value. These are moral principle which originate from social value and represent rules for moral behaviour and conduct of individuals or groups thereof carrying on business.” — **Webster’s Directory**

These definitions reveal the following characteristics of ethics:

- (i) Ethics is a set of moral standards and values acceptable in a society. It is relevant in the context of a society only.
- (ii) Ethics guides human conduct or behaviour.
- (iii) Ethical principles are universal in nature.
- (iv) Ethical standards differ from society to society. What is considered ethical behaviour in one society might be considered unethical in another.
- (v) Ethics is normative or prescriptive in nature. It deals not with what is but what ought to be. It does not rest on feelings of approval or disapproval but on principles. For example, it may be unpleasant to fire an employee but morality may require it.
- (vi) Ethical norms might not be legally binding. But these are more powerful than law because these have the sanction of society.
- (vii) Ethics relates to the behaviour of individuals and groups.
- (viii) Ethics are not hard and fast rules. They are an expression of a society’s attitudes and beliefs. There is an element of discretion as a person has the option to adopt ethical norms. Ethics may differ from place-to-place and time-to-time.
- (ix) There exist no sharp boundaries between ethical and non-ethical. Therefore, people often face ethical dilemmas wherein a clear cut choice is very difficult.
- (x) Ethics aims at perfection in human conduct. It guides law makers in framing proper laws to regulate the behaviour of all citizens.
- (xi) The concepts of equity and justice are implicit in ethics. Fair and equitable treatment to all is its primary aim.
- (xii) Ethics and morality are interrelated but not synonymous.

Types of Ethics:

1. **Normative Ethics:** The study of how people should behave and what actions are morally right or wrong.
2. **Meta ethics:** The investigation of the nature of ethical concepts, language, and reasoning. It examines questions about the meaning of ethical terms, the existence of moral facts, and the nature of moral judgments.
3. **Applied Ethics:** The application of ethical principles to specific areas of human life, such as bioethics (ethical issues in healthcare and medical research), environmental ethics, business ethics, and technology ethics.
4. **Virtue Ethics:** Focuses on the development of virtuous character traits and emphasizes the importance of cultivating good habits and virtues to lead a moral life.
5. **Deontological Ethics:** Emphasizes duty and rules in determining the morality of an action. It focuses on the inherent rightness or wrongness of specific actions, regardless of their consequences.

Professional Ethics

Professional ethics refers to the set of moral principles and values that govern the behavior and actions of individuals in a professional context. It encompasses the specific ethical obligations and responsibilities that professionals have towards their clients, colleagues, organizations, and society as a whole.

Professional ethics provide guidelines for ethical decision-making and help professionals navigate complex situations while upholding integrity, accountability, and the best interests of those they serve. These ethics vary across different professions but generally include the following principles:

1. **Integrity:** Professionals should maintain high standards of honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness in their professional conduct. They should be transparent, avoid conflicts of interest, and act in a manner consistent with their professional values and responsibilities.
2. **Competence:** Professionals have a duty to possess and continuously enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to their field. They should strive to provide services at a level of excellence expected by their clients or stakeholders.

3. **Confidentiality:** Professionals often handle sensitive and confidential information in their work. They should respect and protect the privacy of their clients or individuals involved and only disclose information when authorized or required by law.
4. **Objectivity and Impartiality:** Professionals should strive to maintain objectivity and impartiality in their judgments and decisions. They should avoid favouritism, bias, or undue influence that may compromise the fairness and integrity of their work.
5. **Professional Relationships:** Professionals should establish and maintain respectful and professional relationships with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders. They should avoid exploiting their positions for personal gain or engaging in behavior that may harm professional relationships or undermine trust.
6. **Social Responsibility:** Professionals have a responsibility to consider the broader impacts of their actions on society and the environment. They should promote ethical practices, contribute to the well-being of the community, and advocate for social justice and sustainability within their professional capacity.
7. **Professional Development:** Professionals should engage in continuous learning and professional development to stay updated with advancements in their field. They should also participate in professional associations or organizations that promote ethical standards and provide opportunities for collaboration and growth.

By adhering to professional ethics, practitioners can build and maintain trust, enhance their professional reputation, and contribute to the overall benefit and advancement of their profession. Violations of professional ethics may result in disciplinary actions, legal consequences, or damage to one's professional standing and credibility.

Business Ethics

Business ethics refers to the moral principles and values that guide the behaviour and decision-making of individuals and organizations in the business context. It involves applying ethical principles to business activities, considering the impact of business practices on various stakeholders and society as a whole.

Business ethics encompasses a wide range of principles and issues, including:

1. **Integrity:** Businesses are expected to conduct themselves with honesty, truthfulness, and transparency. They should uphold high moral and ethical standards in their interactions with customers, employees, suppliers, and the community.
2. **Fairness and Transparency:** Businesses should strive to be fair and transparent in their dealings. This includes fair treatment of employees, customers, and suppliers, as well as clear and honest communication regarding products, services, and business practices.
3. **Respect for Stakeholders:** Businesses should respect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, shareholders, and the communities in which they operate. This involves considering their interests, addressing their concerns, and avoiding actions that may harm them.
4. **Compliance with Laws and Regulations:** Businesses should operate within the boundaries of applicable laws, regulations, and industry standards. They should adhere to legal requirements regarding areas such as labor, environmental protection, consumer protection, and fair competition.
5. **Responsibility to the Environment:** Businesses have a responsibility to minimize their negative impact on the environment. This includes adopting sustainable practices, reducing waste and pollution, conserving resources, and considering the long-term environmental consequences of their operations.
6. **Ethical Marketing and Advertising:** Businesses should engage in truthful, accurate, and ethical marketing and advertising practices. They should avoid deceptive or misleading tactics that may manipulate consumers or harm competitors.
7. **Social Responsibility:** Businesses should recognize their role and impact in society beyond profit-making. They should contribute to the well-being of the community, support social initiatives, and consider the broader social and ethical implications of their decisions.
8. **Ethical Leadership:** Business leaders play a crucial role in setting the ethical tone of an organization. They should lead by example, promote ethical behaviour, and establish a culture that encourages integrity, accountability, and responsible decision-making.

Adhering to business ethics is essential for sustainable business success and maintaining trust with stakeholders. It helps businesses build a positive reputation, attract and retain customers and employees, mitigate risks, and contribute to the long-term social and environmental well-being. Violations of business ethics can lead to reputational damage, legal consequences, loss of customer loyalty, and negative societal impacts.

Engineering Ethics

Engineering ethics refers to the ethical principles and standards that guide the professional conduct and decision-making of engineers. It involves considering the moral and social implications of engineering practices and ensuring that engineering activities are conducted in a responsible, accountable, and ethical manner.

Key aspects of engineering ethics include:

1. **Professional Responsibility:** Engineers have a responsibility to prioritize the safety, health, and welfare of the public in their engineering endeavours. They should strive to ensure that their work is performed competently and in accordance with applicable standards and regulations.
2. **Integrity and Honesty:** Engineers should uphold high standards of integrity, honesty, and professionalism. They should be truthful in their professional representations and disclose any conflicts of interest that may compromise their objectivity or impartiality.
3. **Ethical Decision-Making:** Engineers often face complex ethical dilemmas in their work. They should apply ethical reasoning and critical thinking skills to identify and resolve these dilemmas, considering the potential impacts of their decisions on stakeholders and society as a whole.
4. **Risk Assessment and Management:** Engineers should conduct thorough risk assessments to identify and mitigate potential hazards associated with their projects. They should prioritize safety and take appropriate measures to minimize risks to human life, property, and the environment.
5. **Sustainability and Environmental Responsibility:** Engineers should consider the long-term environmental impact of their designs and projects. They should strive to promote sustainable practices, reduce resource consumption, and minimize pollution and waste generation.

6. **Respect for Diversity and Inclusion:** Engineers should respect and value the diversity of individuals and communities affected by their work. They should promote inclusivity and avoid discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, religion, nationality, or socioeconomic status.
7. **Continuous Learning and Professional Development:** Engineers should engage in lifelong learning and professional development to stay updated with advancements in their field. They should stay informed about ethical standards, technological developments, and societal changes that may impact their work.
8. **Collaboration and Communication:** Engineers should collaborate with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders in a transparent and open manner. They should communicate effectively, seek input from diverse perspectives, and ensure that relevant information is shared appropriately.

Adhering to engineering ethics is essential for maintaining public trust, protecting the welfare of individuals and communities, and promoting the credibility and professionalism of the engineering field. Violations of engineering ethics can result in serious consequences, including legal repercussions, professional sanctions, and compromised safety and well-being of the public.

Personal Ethics

Personal ethics refers to the moral principles and values that guide an individual's behaviour, decisions, and actions in their personal life. These ethics shape an individual's character, beliefs, and sense of right and wrong. Personal ethics are often influenced by a combination of factors, including cultural upbringing, personal experiences, religious or philosophical beliefs, and societal norms.

Key aspects of personal ethics include:

1. **Integrity:** Personal ethics revolve around honesty, truthfulness, and consistency in one's actions and behaviour. It involves aligning one's words and deeds, being true to oneself, and upholding moral values even in challenging situations.
2. **Respect for Others:** Personal ethics emphasize treating others with respect, empathy, and dignity. It involves recognizing the inherent worth and rights of individuals, embracing diversity, and valuing the perspectives and experiences of others.

3. **Honouring Commitments:** Personal ethics involve fulfilling commitments and obligations made to oneself and others. It includes being reliable, keeping promises, and following through on responsibilities.
4. **Compassion and Empathy:** Personal ethics encompass showing compassion and empathy towards others. It involves understanding and sharing the feelings and experiences of others, and demonstrating kindness, generosity, and concern for their well-being.
5. **Personal Growth and Development:** Personal ethics include a commitment to personal growth, self-reflection, and self-improvement. It involves striving for self-awareness, learning from experiences, and continuously evolving as an individual.
6. **Responsibility:** Personal ethics involve taking responsibility for one's actions, choices, and their consequences. It includes recognizing the impact of one's behavior on oneself and others, and being accountable for the outcomes of one's decisions.
7. **Environmental Consciousness:** Personal ethics can extend to environmental responsibility. It involves recognizing the importance of environmental sustainability, making choices that minimize harm to the environment, and promoting conservation and responsible resource consumption.
8. **Moral Courage:** Personal ethics encompass having the moral courage to stand up for one's beliefs and principles, even in the face of opposition or adversity. It involves taking ethical action, speaking up against injustice, and advocating for what is right.

Personal ethics provide a foundation for individuals to make ethical choices, navigate moral dilemmas, and lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. They serve as a compass for behavior and decision-making, guiding individuals to act in accordance with their deeply held values and principles. Personal ethics play a crucial role in shaping one's identity, relationships, and contribution to society.

Personal Ethics; Profession, Professionalism, Professional Responsibility

Personal ethics intersect with one's profession and contribute to the concept of professionalism and professional responsibility. Here's how these concepts relate to personal ethics:

Profession: A profession refers to a specialized occupation or field of work that requires specialized knowledge, skills, and expertise. Personal ethics play a role in defining how individuals approach and engage with their chosen profession. They influence how professionals perceive their role, responsibilities, and obligations within their profession.

Professionalism: Professionalism encompasses the conduct, attitude, and behavior expected of individuals in their professional roles. It involves adhering to ethical standards, demonstrating competence, and maintaining a high level of integrity and accountability in professional interactions. Personal ethics guide professionals in upholding these standards and behaving in a manner that reflects their values and ethical principles.

Professional Responsibility: Professional responsibility refers to the obligations and duties that professionals have towards their clients, colleagues, organizations, and society. It involves acting in the best interest of stakeholders, practicing within one's area of expertise, and maintaining confidentiality and trust. Personal ethics contribute to an individual's sense of professional responsibility by shaping their understanding of ethical conduct and guiding their decision-making process in professional contexts.

Personal ethics influence how professionals approach their work, make decisions, and interact with others. They provide a framework for professionals to navigate ethical challenges and dilemmas, ensuring that their actions align with their personal values and the ethical standards of their profession. Professionals who demonstrate a strong sense of personal ethics are more likely to uphold professional responsibility and contribute positively to their field.

Professional Ethics; Conflict of Interest, Gift v/s Bribery, Environmental breaches, Negligence, Deficiencies in state-of-the-art; Vigil Mechanism, Whistle blowing, protected discloser

Professional ethics encompass various ethical issues and considerations within a professional context. Let's explore some of these topics:

Conflict of Interest: A conflict of interest arises when a professional's personal or financial interests conflict with their professional duties or obligations. Professionals have an ethical responsibility to disclose and manage conflicts of interest to ensure that their decisions and actions are not influenced by personal gain or bias.

Gift vs. Bribery: Professionals may encounter situations where they receive gifts or benefits from clients, suppliers, or other parties. It is important to distinguish between acceptable gifts, which are typically token gestures of appreciation, and bribery, which involves offering or accepting undue advantages to influence decisions or gain an unfair advantage. Accepting bribes is unethical and illegal, while the acceptance of appropriate gifts should not compromise professional integrity or create conflicts of interest.

Environmental Breaches: Professionals have a responsibility to consider and mitigate the environmental impact of their work. Engaging in practices that lead to environmental breaches, such as pollution, resource depletion, or destruction of ecosystems, is considered unethical. Ethical professionals strive to promote sustainability, reduce environmental harm, and contribute to environmental stewardship.

Negligence: Negligence refers to the failure to exercise reasonable care or meet professional standards, resulting in harm or injury to others. Ethical professionals are expected to act with due diligence, competence, and care in their professional activities to avoid negligence and protect the well-being of clients, stakeholders, and the public.

Deficiencies in State-of-the-Art: Professionals are expected to stay updated with the latest knowledge, advancements, and best practices in their field. Failing to keep abreast of developments or deliberately disregarding the state-of-the-art can lead to deficiencies in professional services. Ethical professionals actively engage in continuous learning, professional development, and self-improvement to provide high-quality and up-to-date services.

Vigil Mechanism, Whistleblowing, and Protected Disclosure: Organizations often establish vigil mechanisms or whistle-blower policies to encourage the reporting of unethical behaviour, misconduct, or illegal activities within the organization. Professionals have an ethical duty to report such wrongdoing through protected disclosure channels when they observe or become aware of unethical or illegal activities. Whistleblowing protects the interests of stakeholders and helps maintain integrity and accountability within the organization and the profession as a whole.

These topics highlight the importance of professional ethics in guiding ethical decision-making, behaviour, and responsibilities within a professional context. Adhering to ethical standards helps professionals maintain trust, protect the interests of stakeholders, and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

DISCLAIMER

This study Material is Compiled by Dr. Manisha Bhatt. The basic objective of this material is to provide extra reading and learning to students so as to enable to obtain clear concept of the subject. Students should also supplement their study by reference to the books recommended by B V M Engineering College-AN AUTONOMUS INSTITUTION