Professional Ethics

Faculty of Law

Ethics

- Ethics are moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conduct of an activity.
- Professional ethics refers to norms and values that guide conduct within a professional context.
- It refers to codes of conduct governing behaviour in specific vocations like law, medicine, engineering, finance, etc.

Ethics

There are conventionally two approaches in the study of ethics:
- Micro-ethics, which deals with decisions and problems of individuals, professionals, and companies.
- Macro-ethics, which deals with the societal problems on a regional/national level. For example, global issues the collective responsibilities of groups such as professionals.

Moral Issues
- The reasons for people, including the employer and employees, behaving unethically may be classified into three categories:

1. Resource crunch
- Due to pressure through time limits, availability of money or budgetary constraints, and technology decay or obsolescence.
- Pressure from the government to complete the project in time (e.g., before the elections).

2. Opportunity

Double standards or behavior of the employers towards the employees and the public. Management projecting their own interests more than that of their employees.

3. Attitude

Poor attitude of the employees set in due to the following reasons
a) Low morale of the employees because of dissatisfaction and downsizing
b) Absence of grievance redressal mechanism

c) Lack of promotion or career development policies or denied promotions,
d) Lack of transparency
e) Absence of a recognition and reward system, and
f) Poor working environments

Moral Autonomy

- Moral autonomy is defined as decisions and actions exercised on the basis of moral concern for other people and recognition of good moral reasons.
- Alternatively, moral autonomy means 'self-determined' or 'independent'.
- The autonomous people hold moral beliefs and attitudes based on their critical reflection rather than on passive adoption of the conventions of the society or profession.

Skills related to moral autonomy

1. Proficiency in recognizing moral problems in engineering and the ability to distinguish problems in law, economics, and religion.
2. Skill in comprehending, clarifying, and critically assessing arguments on different aspects of moral issues.
3. Ability to form consistent and comprehensive viewpoints based on facts.
4. Awareness of alternate responses to the issues and creative solutions.
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6. Sensitivity to genuine difficulties and subtleties, including willingness to undergo and tolerate some uncertainty while making decisions.
7. Using rational dialogue in resolving moral conflicts and developing tolerance of different perspectives among people.
8. Maintaining moral integrity.

Self Control, Self Interest, and Self Respect

- **Self-Control:** It is a virtue of maintaining personal discipline. It means a strong will and motivation, and avoidance of fear, hatred, lack of effort, temptation, self-deception, and emotional response. It encompasses courage and good judgment, also. Self-respect promotes self-control.
- **Self Interest:** Self-interest is being good and acceptable to oneself. It is pursuing what is good for oneself. It is very ethical to possess self-interest.
- **Self Respect:** It is defined as valuing oneself in morally suitable ways. Self-respect includes:
  - recognition, which means respect for others, their ideas, decisions, abilities, and rights, and
  - appraisal, which means properly valuing ourselves as to how well we face moral standards. An intensive but balanced feeling of self-respect is a sense of honour.

Professionalism

- The conduct, aims, and qualities that characterise a profession or a professional person.
- Professionalism is a set of internalized values and behaviors that distinguish a vocation from mere employment.

Professionalism - Components

- Competence: Specialised, continually updated knowledge.
- Conscientiousness: Commitment to do things thoroughly and carefully.
- Reliability: Meeting deadlines, honouring responsibilities.
- Civility and Respect: Constructive communication, emotional intelligence.
- Presentation: Appropriate dress, grooming, language, and demeanour.

Professional Ethics

- Professional ethics refers to norms and values that guide conduct within a professional context.
- It bridges moral philosophy and occupational practice.

Purpose:
- Prevent abuse of professional power.
- Maintain public trust in the profession.
- Ensure accountability and transparency.

Professional Ethics

Professional Ethics is based on principles of:

- Integrity: Truthfulness and consistency of action.
- Objectivity: Avoidance of bias and conflicts of interest.
- Confidentiality: Protection of sensitive information.
- Accountability: Owning one's decisions and their impacts.
- Loyalty to public interest over personal gain.

Characteristics of profession/professionalism

1. **Extensive Training**

Entry into the profession requires an extensive period of training of intellectual (competence) and moral (integrity) character.

2. **Knowledge and Skills**

Knowledge and skills (competence) are necessary for the well-being of the society. For example, Knowledge of physicians protects us from disease and restores health.

3. **Monopoly** :

The monopoly control is achieved in two ways:

(a) Profession convinces the community that only those who have graduated from the professional school should be allowed to hold the professional title.

(b) By persuading the community to have a licensing system for those who want to enter the profession. Practising without a license is made illegal

4. **Autonomy in Workplace:**

Professionals have considerable freedom in choosing their clients. Even the professionals working in large organisations exercise a large degree of discretion in carrying out their responsibilities.

Characteristics of profession/professionalism

5. **Ethical Standards** :

Professional societies promulgate codes of conduct to regulate professionals against abuse or any unethical decisions.

Differences Between Personal Ethics and Business Ethics

Criteria	Personal Ethics	Business/Professional Ethics
Basis	Individual beliefs, religion, upbringing	Codified by profession or corporation
Scope	Guides private behavior	Guides decisions in work/professional roles
Enforcement	Internal conscience, social judgment	External – disciplinary bodies, employer rules
Conflicts	Subjective (based on personal values)	Objective standards (defined by law or profession)

Conflict of Interest

A situation where a professional's personal interests may compromise or appear to compromise their impartiality.

Common Types:
- **Self-dealing:** Awarding contracts to one's own company.
- **Dual agency:** Representing both parties in a transaction.
- **Accepting gifts or favours** from clients/suppliers.
- **Nepotism:** Hiring or favouring relatives/friends.

Breach of Professional Ethics

Common Ethical Breaches:

- Conflict of interest not disclosed
- Misrepresentation or exaggeration of qualifications or work
- Data falsification
- Overcharging or misuse of client resources
- Breach of confidentiality
- Plagiarism in academic/professional writing

Breach of Professional Ethics

Causes:
- Pressure to meet unrealistic targets
- Poor corporate culture or tone at the top
- Inadequate enforcement of codes
- Lack of training or awareness

Consequences:
- Disciplinary action (suspension, termination)
- Criminal prosecution (fraud, breach of trust)
- Damage to public trust in the profession
- Reputational loss

Globalization

- Globalisation means the integration of countries through commerce, transfer of technology, and exchange of information and culture.
- For the engineers, the issues such as waste disposal, e-waste, computer ethics and environmental ethics have assumed greater importance for their very sustenance and progress.

Standards

- Common minimal rights are to be followed to smooth the transactions when the engineers and employers.
- At the international level, the organisations are expected to adopt the minimum levels of:

(a) values, such as mutual support, loyalty, and reciprocity,

(b) the negative duty of refraining from harmful actions such as violence and fraud, and

(c) basic fairness and justice in case of conflicts.

Environmental Ethics

It is the study of moral issues concerning the environment, and moral perspectives, beliefs, or attitudes concerning those issues.

Environmental ethics is concerned with the following issues:
1. Ensure protection (safety) of the environment,
2. Prevent the degradation of the environment, and
3. Slow down the exploitation of natural resources, so that the future generation can survive.

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