

## Session 10

### 5. Ethics in the professions

Professional ethics encompass the personal, organizational and corporate standards of behavior expected of professionals.

Professionals and those working in acknowledged professions, exercise specialist knowledge and skill. How the use of this knowledge should be governed when providing a service to the public can be considered a moral issue and is termed professional ethics.

Professionals are capable of making judgments, applying their skills and reaching informed decisions in situations that the general public cannot, because they have not received the relevant training. One of the earliest examples of professional ethics is probably the Hippocratic oath to which medical doctors still adhere to this day.

#### Components

Some professional organizations define their ethical approach in terms of a number of discrete components. Typically these include:

Honesty

Integrity

Transparency

Accountability

Confidentiality

Objectivity

Respectfulness

Obedience to the law

Loyalty

### **Implementation**

Most professions have internally enforced codes of practice that members of the profession must follow to prevent exploitation of the client and to preserve the integrity of the profession. This is not only for the benefit of the client but also for the benefit of those belonging to the profession.

Disciplinary codes allow the profession to define a standard of conduct and ensure that individual practitioners meet this standard, by disciplining them from the professional body if they do not practice accordingly. This allows those professionals who act with conscience to practice in the knowledge that they will not be undermined commercially by those who have fewer ethical qualms. It also maintains the public's trust in the profession, encouraging the public to continue seeking their services.

### **Internal regulation**

In cases where professional bodies regulate their own ethics, there are possibilities for such bodies to become self-serving and to fail to follow their own ethical code when dealing with renegade members. This is because of the nature of professions in which they have almost a complete monopoly on a particular area of knowledge. For example, until recently, the English courts deferred to the professional consensus on matters relating to their practice that lay outside case law and legislation.

### **Statutory regulation**

In many countries there is some statutory regulation of professional ethical standards such as the statutory bodies that regulate nursing and midwifery in England and Wales. Failure to comply with standards can thus become a matter for the courts.

For example, a lay member of the public should not be held responsible for failing to act to save a car crash victim because they could not give an appropriate emergency treatment. This is because they do not have the relevant knowledge and experience. In contrast, a fully trained doctor (with the correct equipment) would be capable of making the correct diagnosis and carrying out appropriate procedures. Failure of a doctor to help in such a situation would generally be regarded as negligent and unethical. An untrained person would not be considered to be negligent for failing to act in such circumstances and might indeed be considered to be negligent for acting and potentially causing more damage and possible loss of life.

A business may approach a professional engineer to certify the safety of a project which is not safe. Whilst one engineer may refuse to certify the project on moral grounds, the business may find a less scrupulous engineer who will be prepared to certify the project for a bribe, thus saving the business the expense of redesigning.

### **Separatism**

On a theoretical level, there is debate as to whether an ethical code for a profession should be consistent with the requirements of morality governing the public. Separatists argue that professions should be allowed to go beyond such confines when they judge it necessary. This is because they are trained to produce certain outcomes which may take moral precedence over other functions of society.

For example, it could be argued that a doctor may lie to a patient about the severity of their condition, if there is reason to think that telling the patient could cause them so much distress that it would be detrimental to their health. This would be a disrespect of the patient's autonomy, as it denies them information on something that could have a great impact on their life. This would generally be seen as morally wrong. However, if the end of improving and maintaining health is given a moral priority in society, then it may be justifiable to contravene other moral demands in order to meet this goal.

Separatism is based on a relativist conception of morality that there can be different, equally

valid moral codes that apply to different sections of society and differences in codes between societies (see moral relativism). If moral universalism is ascribed to, then this would be inconsistent with the view that professions can have a different moral code, as the Universalist holds that there is only one valid moral code for all.

### **5.1. School of Industrial engineers**

The National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) adheres to a code of ethics, a set of general principles lending aid to all engineers who strive for the dignity and true worth of the profession. The following is excerpted from the NSPE Web site. It is included here to introduce you to the responsibilities associated with your commitment to study engineering. Regardless of the degree you are pursuing, the code of ethics and fundamental canons are expected to guide your behavior both while you are studying in our school and later when you represent the school as a graduate.

Preamble Engineering is an important and learned profession. As members of this profession, engineers are expected to exhibit the highest standards of honesty and integrity. Engineering has a direct and vital impact on the quality of life for all people. Accordingly, the services provided by engineers require honesty, impartiality, fairness and equity, and must be dedicated to the protection of the public health, safety and welfare. Engineers must perform under a standard of professional behavior that requires adherence to the highest principles of ethical conduct.

#### **The Fundamental Principles**

Engineers uphold and advance the integrity, honor and dignity of the engineering profession by:

1. Using their knowledge and skill for the enhancement of human welfare;
2. Being honest and impartial, and serving with fidelity the public, their employers and clients;
3. Striving to increase the competence and prestige of the engineering profession; and

4. Supporting the professional and technical societies of their disciplines.

### **The Fundamental Canons**

1. Engineers shall hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public in the performance of their professional duties.

2. Engineers shall perform services only in the areas of their competence.

3. Engineers shall issue public statements only in an objective and truthful manner.

4. Engineers shall act in professional matters for each employer or client as faithful agents or trustees, and shall avoid conflicts of interest.

5. Engineers shall build their professional reputation on the merit of their services and shall not compete unfairly with others.

6. Engineers shall associate only with reputable persons or organizations.

7. Engineers shall continue their professional development throughout their careers and shall provide opportunities for the professional development of those engineers under their supervision.

### **5.2. Ethics and the professional**

CFP Board adopted the Code of Ethics to establish the highest principles and standards. These Principles are general statements expressing the ethical and professional ideals certificates and registrants are expected to display in their professional activities. As such, the Principles are aspirational in character and provide a source of guidance for certificates and registrants. The Principles form the basis of CFP Board's Rules of Conduct, Practice Standards and Disciplinary Rules, and these documents together reflect CFP Board's recognition of certificates' and registrants' responsibilities to the public, clients, colleagues and employers.

Principle 1 – Integrity: Provide professional services with integrity.

Integrity demands honesty and candor which must not be subordinated to personal gain or an advantage. Certificates are placed in positions of trust by clients, and the ultimate source of that trust is the certificate's personal integrity. Allowance can be made for innocent error and legitimate differences of opinion, but integrity cannot co-exist with deceit or subordination of one's principles.

Principle 2 – Objectivity: Provide professional services objectively.

Objectivity requires intellectual honesty and impartiality. Regardless of the particular service rendered or the capacity in which a certificate functions, certificates should protect the integrity of their work, maintain objectivity and avoid subordination of their judgment.

Principle 3 – Competence: Maintain the knowledge and skill necessary to provide professional services competently.

Competence means attaining and maintaining an adequate level of knowledge and skill, and application of that knowledge and skill in providing services to clients. Competence also includes the wisdom to recognize the limitations of that knowledge and when consultation with other professionals is appropriate or referral to other professionals necessary. Certificates make a continuing commitment to learning and professional improvement.

Principle 4 – Fairness: Be fair and reasonable in all professional relationships. Disclose conflicts of interest.

Fairness requires impartiality, intellectual honesty and disclosure of material conflicts of interest. It involves a subordination of one's own feelings, prejudices and desires so as to achieve a proper balance of conflicting interests. Fairness is treating others in the same fashion that you would want to be treated.

Principle 5 – Confidentiality: Protect the confidentiality of all client information.

Confidentiality means ensuring that information is accessible only to those authorized to have access. A relationship of trust and confidence with the client can only be built upon the understanding that the client's information will remain confidential.

Principle 6 – Professionalism: Act in a manner that demonstrates exemplary professional conduct.

Professionalism requires behaving with dignity and courtesy to clients, fellow professionals, and others in business-related activities. Certificates cooperate with fellow certificates to enhance and maintain the profession's public image and improve the quality of services.

Principle 7 – Diligence: Provide professional services diligently.

Diligence is the provision of services in a reasonably prompt and thorough manner, including the proper planning for, and supervision of, the rendering of professional services.