

Module 1B: Professional Ethics

1. Definitions

Ethics

Ethics are a set of moral principles that govern the behavior of individuals or groups, providing guidelines for distinguishing right from wrong^[1].

Professional Ethics

Professional ethics are standards or codes of behavior expected within a profession. They guide professionals in acting with integrity, accountability, and fairness in their occupational roles, often formalized by professional bodies or associations^[2].

Business Ethics

Business ethics refer to the principles, standards, and values that guide behavior in the world of business. They encompass issues such as corporate governance, insider trading, bribery, discrimination, and corporate social responsibility, going beyond legal requirements to build trust and credibility^{[1] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]}.

Corporate Ethics

Corporate ethics is a subset of business ethics focused specifically on ethical policies, frameworks, and conduct expected within organizations. It addresses collective behavior at the corporate level, including transparency, fair competition, and environmental and social responsibilities^{[3] [4]}.

Engineering Ethics

Engineering ethics are the moral obligations and responsibilities that guide engineers while making decisions, emphasizing the protection of public health, safety, and welfare^[9].

Personal Ethics

Personal ethics are individual beliefs and values about right and wrong, which influence one's behavior in personal and professional settings.

2. Code of Ethics – Institution of Engineers (India)

The Institution of Engineers (India) (IEI) lays down a comprehensive Code of Ethics for its members, focusing on:

- Commitment to community welfare, health, and safety,
- Maintaining integrity, honesty, and impartiality,
- Practicing within their competence,
- Protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development,
- Avoiding actions that may discredit the profession or the IEI,
- Disclosing potential conflicts of interest,
- Keeping client/employer information confidential,
- Reporting unethical practices and rejecting unfair offers^{[9] [10]}.

Key Tenets:

- Utilize knowledge for community welfare.
- Maintain honor and dignity in professional actions.
- Work only in one's field of competence.
- Inform stakeholders of consequences of decisions.
- Sustain honesty and fairness.
- Avoid injuring the reputation of others.
- Reject offers involving unfair practice or environmental harm.
- Uphold sustainability and institutional reputation^{[9] [10]}.

3. Profession, Professionalism, Professional Responsibility, Professional Ethics

- **Profession:** A vocation with specialized training, governed by ethical codes, offering services to the public.
- **Professionalism:** Demonstrating competence, integrity, self-regulation, and dedication to public good in one's work.
- **Professional Responsibility:** The duty to act in the best interests of clients, employers, the profession, and society, prioritizing safety, welfare, and ethical standards^{[2] [11]}.
- **Professional Ethics:** The subset of ethics governing professional conduct, covering obligations to clients, employers, society, and oneself.

4. Key Issues in Professional Ethics

Issue	Definition/Example	Implication
Conflict of Interest	Situations where personal interests clash with professional duties, potentially compromising impartiality	Undermines trust, can lead to biased decisions, requires transparency and disclosure ^{[12] [13] [11]}

Issue	Definition/Example	Implication
Gift vs Bribery	Gifts are voluntary tokens of appreciation; bribery is an illicit exchange for influence or action	Bribery compromises fairness, integrity, and legal compliance, whereas reasonable gifts often have strict value and intent guidelines in codes of conduct [14] [15]
Environmental Breaches	Violations of laws/regulations that protect the environment	Can cause harm, fines, reputational loss; often result from negligence or willful acts, sometimes enabled by corruption [14] [16]
Negligence	Failure to exercise appropriate care, resulting in harm	Can lead to safety incidents, legal action, loss of license
Deficiencies in State-of-the-art	Not adhering to best current practices or knowledge in the profession	Results in substandard service, technical failures, or liability

5. Vigil Mechanism, Whistleblowing, and Protected Disclosures

- **Vigil Mechanism:** A formal policy or system in organizations for employees to report unethical, illegal, or improper conduct confidentially.
- **Whistleblowing:** The act of reporting wrongdoing, especially corruption, fraud, or safety/law violations, to authorities or the public to prevent harm or bring about justice [\[17\]](#) [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#).
- **Protected Disclosures:** Provisions within laws or corporate policies that protect whistleblowers from retaliation, providing avenues for safe disclosure. Strong protections and clear mechanisms are key for effective whistleblowing [\[17\]](#) [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#).

6. Ethical and Legal Enforcement

- Professional and corporate environments now require codes of conduct, ethics training, clear whistleblowing and vigil mechanisms, as well as robust enforcement and disciplinary procedures.
- Professional bodies and regulatory agencies play an active role in monitoring compliance and investigating complaints [\[2\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) [\[20\]](#).

In summary:

Professional ethics encompass the framework and guidelines for right conduct in professional settings, addressing issues like conflicts of interest, corruption, and environmental responsibility, and are formalized by institutional codes such as those provided by the Institution of Engineers (India). Upholding these ethical standards is essential for the integrity of the profession and the protection of the public interest.

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1. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/business-ethics.asp>
2. <https://www.iaa.govt.nz/for-advisers/adviser-tools/ethics-toolkit/professional-ethics-and-codes-of-conduct/>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_ethics
4. <https://www.v-comply.com/blog/business-corporate-ethics-definition-principles-types/>

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