

WHY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE
ETHICS FOR THE
PROFESSIONS

ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS

- Concept of roles
- Individuals play a variety of roles all at once as teachers, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, roommates, club members, citizens, to name a few
- With the roles come the obligations

Roles and Obligations

- Some basic obligations
- Refraining from harming other people
- Obeying the laws of the government of which you are a citizen
- Not lying
- Not stealing
- Not indulging in unfair professional practices

The Topic of Professional Ethics

- “The topic of professional ethics concerns the obligations held by individuals in their particular roles as professionals.” – *Ethics for the Professions*, Eds. John R Rowan and Samuel Zinaich, JR.
- Who is a private citizen and who is a professional?
- A householder could be a private citizen. For example, as a mother, the obligations in a household are to the members of the household.

Who is a Professional?

- The responsibilities of a professional goes beyond the functions of a household.
- For example, an engineer or a doctor is ethically obligated to his/her clients.
- An engineer's obligation to meet certain specification requirements within a budget, such as designing a more efficient and inexpensive automobile transmission, may conflict with his look out for the safety of the public.

How does ethics help?

- The circumstances surrounding issues are varied and complex, therefore, professionals must be logically and critically analyze those circumstances if they are to make ethically sound decisions.
- Professional ethics formulates some basic ethical postulates that would be a guide to sound ethical decision-making.

What are the obligations of the professionals?

- First, professionals are obligated to obey the laws of their societies.
- Second, specific professions and industries have their own rules to be followed.
- Third, organizations have ethical codes of behavior.

Ethical Rules and Interpretation

- First, the formal rules of a profession is open to interpretation.
- Second, professionals should also evaluate the fairness of the existing rules.
- The desirable result of adherence to ethical obligations is more democratic working environment.

Prudence or Common sense

- Prudence is based on considerations of self-interest. (Cost-cutting versus good employment practices)
- Common sense is based on prevalent social beliefs and conventions. (Injunction against wearing short skirts in the West.)
- Both prudence and common sense are not correct yardsticks for ethics.

Ethics-Objective Standards

- Can ethics have objective set of rules as that of laws of science?
- Is ethics subjective?
- Hitler believed that creating a master race was good for Germany. Hence, in his eyes genocide was justified.
- Therefore, is ethics relative?

Ethical Objectivism vs Relativism

- Ethical rules ought to have normative standards.
- Individual whims and fancies cannot be accommodated in professional ethics.
- An argument for relativism would justify any convenient moral standpoint without any accountability for one's actions.
(Anything goes attitude)

Professionals, Ethics and Moral Theory

- 1. What you feel right is not necessarily what is right.
- 2. Moral theories are mostly abstract and abstruse. Hence, they must be applied to real-life situations.
- 3. The dilemma of choosing one's career or common good is not a persuasive argument for not being ethical.

Benefits of being ethical

- Professionals ought to act in the best interests of their organization. Being a professional who acts in one's own and a company's best interest is not contradictory but complementary to being an ethical actor.