

LECTURE-4

PROFESSIONAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) ETHICS

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Profession: An occupation calling for special knowledge e.g. the work of a Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer, Scientists etc.

Occupation: One's trade or Job.

Professional ethics: Addresses itself to the problems of conduct in professional life.

Professional ethics addresses to the problems of conduct in professional life. The modern society needs services of a large number of professionals. They range from plumbers, bakers, salespersons, clerks to managers, engineers and university professors. They have varying degrees of social recognition and status. Some professional groups, like those of lawyers, doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers command greater respect and authority. They have been called the 'higher professions' or the 'learned professions'. This is because to practice them one needs a university degree, and higher levels of intellectual and professional skills. They are better organized and are more conscious of their professional belongingness, professional image and professional duties. Also, ethical issues arising in the practice of this practice of these professions have been well articulated and commented upon. These higher professions have also evolved their separate codes of professional ethics, and some mechanisms to seek adherence to these codes by individual members. Therefore, in this discussion on professional ethics the word profession is used to designate these learned professions only.

Four centuries ago Francis Bacon said knowledge is power. This is much more true of specialized, professional knowledge of the modern times. Like other forms of power it has great potential for advancing human well-being. But if misutilised in an irresponsible or exploitative way it can also cause grievous harm. Wily lawyers, corrupt judges, greedy doctors, irresponsible engineers and insincere teachers are scourge on society. Because of the technicalities and complexities involved in their work, the general public has little knowledge of their professional immorality or competence till the actual damage is done: innocents get sentenced, patients die and bridges collapse. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate these professions to safe guard the interests of the society. One form of this regulation is through legislative and legal processes. For example, medical practice is now included under the provisions of Consumer's Protection Act. Similarly, there are number of environmental,

industrial and labour laws to regulate engineering activities. But these can be at best check only some of the grossest violations of professional authority. A better way is voluntary self-regulation by professionals themselves, particularly through professional societies. These bodies lay down the rules regarding standards of professional practice and professional conduct. Some of them, like the Medical Council and bar Council, also have legal powers to take disciplinary or punitive actions against erring members. However, the foundations of professional ethics, like those of ethics in general, are much deeper than the externally imposed laws, rules and norms of professional practice. They reside in the moral sensitivity and moral will of the individual. Being conscious of their collective, social and moral responsibility as organized social institutions, the professions have also evolved distinct ethos towards their professional work. Certain basic elements of this ethos are common to all the higher professions. The concepts of professional ethics flow out of this professional ethos. To bring out this ethos we first ask and answer the question, what is a profession?

Profession

The term profession and professional are used in many different senses. Some of them are not relevant in the present context. For example, one meaning of the word professional is a person who engages in sporting, artistic or some other leisurely activity for earning money rather than for merely enjoying it as a hobby. In this sense it distinguishes a professional from an amateur. Similarly, in common parlance the word profession is often used to denote any paid occupation, job or career. But the higher professions we are considering here are not just any other way of earning a livelihood. They have certain distinctive attributes which are both sociological and ethical. An early, and thorough, sociological study of professions identifies five distinct attributes of modern professions:

1. Systematic body of theory
2. Professional authority
3. Sanction of the community
4. Regulative code of ethics
5. The professional culture

Professional Ethos

Ethos - The fundamental and distinctive character of a group, social context, or period of time, typically expressed in attitudes, habits, and beliefs OR Shared fundamental traits.

1. One main pillar of professional ethos is the striving for excellence.

Professional excellence requires mastery of the theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills of the profession and their continuous up gradation to keep abreast of

the latest developments in one's field. Of even greater importance is the enthusiasm for applying this knowledge to find solution to challenging problem at hand. True professionals feel exhilarated when they find the optimal solution to a tricky problem.

2. The second pillar of professionalism is motivation of service

When a person approaches a professional, say with a medical or a legal problem, the professional's primary concern ought to be , how can I help the person with the best possible remedy. Similarly, when entrusted with designing or executing a project an engineer should find the best engineering solution, while safeguarding the interests of the workers, the community, and natural environmental . That would be the right professional attitude for advancing the ideals of the profession and redeeming its promise to serve the society. Instead, if the professional approaches the task with the primary motivation of 'how much money I can make out of the transaction', or 'how can I advance my personal gains', it would be against the professional ethos. Such an attitude may be called a commercial attitude which is the antithesis of professional attitude. In fact commercialization of professions is one of the important problems sought to be counteracted by the concept of professional ethics.

3. The third pillar of professionalism is abiding sense of responsibility.

A professional ought to be ever conscious of his or her prime responsibility to use the accumulated wisdom of the profession, its knowledge and skills, its power and authority, for helping others , for social betterment and for advancing human well-being, and not otherwise.

Code of Professional Ethics

The primary purpose of a written code of professional ethics is to encourage and inspire individual members to practice the profession in ethical manner. The code articulates professional ideals, and the duties and obligations of the members of the profession. It also gives general guidelines for deciding the right conduct in professional situations.

Codes of ethics are present at all levels of society, business and individual behavior. Many are codified in writing and enforced with penalties while others are more flexible, dependent on the individual's perception of right, and wrong.

Regardless of their source or means of enforcement, codes of ethics permeate modern life and are factors to be considered in almost every facet of daily life, from proper work behavior to double parking.

A code of ethics is a set of principles and rules used by companies, professional organizations and individuals to govern their decision making in choosing between right and wrong. Depending on the context of a given code of ethics, penalties and/or sanctions may result from a violation.

Codes of ethics are generally used in the business and professional context to assure the public that corporations and members of regulated professions are acting in a socially and professionally acceptable manner. Organizations with an established and published code of ethics have in place review processes and appeals procedures to guard against malicious or self-serving use of the code for individual benefit.

Professional Conduct for lawyers

This code of ethics provides guidance for lawyers on matters ranging from client confidentiality, to partnerships, to treatment of witnesses inside and outside the courtroom. Proven violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct can result in penalties ranging from verbal and written censure up to loss of the ability to practice law.

In this case, adherence to a written code of ethics is assumed to be a part of participating in the legal profession and is a responsibility on the part of each individual attorney. Professional codes of ethics rely on sanctions and penalties to ensure that they are followed and that those involved in the profession in question, as well as those served by the profession, will report violation to maintain the integrity and quality of service provided.

Professional Conduct for Physicians

Ethical obligations of medical directors, specifies that :(1) Placing the interests of patients above other considerations, such as personal interests (eg, financial incentives) or employer business interests (e.g., profit). This entails applying the plan parameters to each patient equally and engaging in neither discrimination nor favoritism, is part of adherence to professional medical standards.

Codes for Corporations and Non-Profit Organizations

Corporations and non-profits have codes of ethics to assist workers in determining if certain behaviors are appropriate and acceptable in their dealings with clients and outside agencies.

Examples of governed behaviours include:

1. Giving or accepting of gifts or services between an employee and a client or official
2. Making promises regarding company performance and responsibilities
3. Profiting from, or enabling others to profit from, inside information regarding company performance, financial stability or internal problems

Many organizations require employees to attend yearly training on ethics and responsibilities and in some cases, to sign statements promising to adhere to all company ethics guidelines.

Ethics guidelines have become a greater topic of public interest following recent events in the home mortgage and financial sectors that called into question whether ethics policies were actually being followed or merely given lip service while pursuing the greatest profit for the company.

ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS –THE CURRENT SCENARIO

The issues in professional ethics are becoming very complex in the current scenario. The unethical practices are rapidly increasing and their impact is also becoming far-reaching. The salient categories of the unethical practices afflicting all the professions are as follows:

1. Corruption in multiple forms and at various levels
2. Tax evasion, misappropriation and misuse of public property
3. Misleading propaganda, unethical advertisements and sales promotion
4. Cut-throat competition
5. Exploiting the weakness of consumers through various temptations
6. Adulteration and spurious production
7. Endangering the health and safety of public at large
8. Hoarding and over-charging etc

Many agencies such as the government bodies, professional societies, NGOs, media and professional educators etc are all trying to devise ways and means to control the situation.

The following methods are being proposed and implemented:

1. Promoting awareness about professional ethics by introducing new courses, refresher programs and case studies.

2. Administering oaths and prescribing codes of ethical conduct for specific professional disciplines
3. Setting up mechanisms for intensive audit inspection and monitoring the activities
4. Framing more stringent laws and devising harder punishments for offences
5. Promoting transparency in working systems through mechanisms like RTI (right to information act), etc.
6. Carrying out 'sting operations' and widely publicizing serious lapses in ethical conduct of profession through media.
7. Encouraging whistle blowing by individuals or groups
8. Setting up vigilance commissions, ethics committees, tribunals, consumer protection forums etc.
9. Filing public interest litigations etc.

While there is no denying the fact that all the above methods are with earnest intention to tackle the present situation, however these have a temporary utility and prove useful to a limited degree only. The focus in these methods is primarily towards curbing the ill-effects rather than rectifying the root cause, namely the faulty world-view, which continues to remain dominant. **The real way out is to work towards developing the ethical competence by transforming the consciousness of people through right understanding.** Unless the inbuilt dichotomy between the wrongly perceived notion of happiness through wealth maximization and expectations of human welfare, the expectations of common good is resolved, no breakthrough is possible.

WORK ETHICS AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

The term '**work ethics**' is primarily used for **ethical attitude** to work done in the context of employment. Every employer, be it an individual or an organization, expects efficient and meticulous performance of duties assigned to the employees. This is a rightful expectation, and therefore meeting this expectation is a moral demand on the employees. A person is paid wages, given a career and a status by the employer. Justice and fair play demand that in return the employee gives out his or her best to the organization. It should be done out of will/wish, as an inner ethical demands of work ethics. Shirking work , making excuses for poor performance, finding faults with the organization , etc are against the demands of work ethics. In the absence of ethical considerations from both the sides, employer-employee relationship becomes unfair, with little mutual trust and cooperation. This leads to poor work culture and reduced productive efficiency for the organization.

The second dimension of work ethics is concerned with the **sense of loyalty** towards the organization. Loyalty means safeguarding and promoting the interests of the organization: at least not harming it in any way. It requires a sense of devotion and faithfulness much beyond the routine job requirements and duties. Loyalty also means giving organizational needs a higher priority over personal needs. It means standing by the organization when it faces difficult times. A shining example of such a sense of loyalty was shown by the teachers of the Banaras Hindu University in 1930's when the British government stopped aid to the university. On their own initiative the teachers accepted salary cuts and worked for nearly four years at reduced salaries.

Discipline is the third dimension of work ethics. Every organization and work group has, and must have, written as well as unwritten rules, norms and ways of working. Following them in the letter and spirit is a part of discipline. Similarly, there is hierarchy of power and authority at work place. Those at the lower level of the hierarchy are expected to follow orders, directives and suggestions given by their superiors. Obeying these orders is a part of discipline. Only those who are themselves disciplined in this sense can expect obedience from their own subordinates.

It loses much of its effectiveness if its enforcement needs constant use of coercive measures. Secondly, **the sense of discipline should not mean slavish obedience of even inhuman orders, or unquestioned submission to the whims and fancies of supervisors.** should it mean suppression of all forms of disagree or voicing of grievances. A good organization must provide appropriate channels for grievance redressal, and for investigating complaints against its higher level executives.

Trustworthiness, reliability and dependability are important virtues of character at work place. They promote both the work efficiency and the quality of work life. Team working and team spirit is the essential strength of successful organization today. Such team spirit cannot be realized without the team members having the virtues of trustworthiness and dependability. The saying, "ability without dependability is a liability" is very much true in the context of team work.

Role of ethics in our professional life

- The quality of work life is affected positively in the presence of ethical attitudes and practices at the work place.

- They create a climate of friendliness, cooperation, trust and mutual respect amongst colleagues and co-workers.
- Working in such a value rich environment is a fulfilling experience.
- It benefits the organization as well, because the real strength of an organization is in the quality of inter-personal relationships. But it requires conscious and continuous effort to instill and to nurture these values in the persons forming the work group. Such nurturance ought to be one of the main goals of the top levels of the organization.
- The quality of work life is equally affected by what have been called the “minor” virtues, like being cheerful, polite and courteous, being punctual and doing things in time, being tidy and organized in work-habit. These behavioural values are clearly visible and their impact is immediate. Their cultivation also needs effort and attention.

SOME ENCOURAGING TRENDS

In the past it was generally thought that the sphere of ethics and human values is the personal life of an individual. It was here that one was expected to cultivate virtues and to show attitudes of love, kindness and compassion in inter-personal relationship. Work life, professional life, business life, public life, etc., were the areas where the rules of conduct were expected to be entirely different. These were thought to be the arena for cut-throat competition and vigorous promotion of self-interest with no concern for others. One was expected to grab opportunities and seize power, to stay ahead, to dominate and to manipulate others. However, gradually it is being realized that sustainable progress in any field cannot be achieved without due regard of human values. And secondly, success achieved through mercenary attitudes (an employee who works only for personal gain) and practices is of little meaning and purpose even for those who come out at the top in the rat race. More and more persons are asking for better quality of work life, for the deeper level of life satisfaction, and for more fulfilling relationships at work place and in business. These sentiments are getting stronger in the modern times of globalization in the business environment. Business ethics is being taught in business schools and engineering ethics in engineering colleges. Many companies are adopting guidelines for ethics, core corporate values, mission statements etc. It is heartening to see that one suggested global code of basic values for international business includes the following eight values:

1. **Love:** treating others, whether they are competitors or allies, with compassion and care.
2. **Truthfulness**

3. **Fairness:** justice, treating others as one would like to be treated.
4. **Freedom:** the right of individuals to express their ideas.
5. **Unity:** the sense of belonging to a group, to the wider community
6. **Tolerance:** of different value system
7. **Responsibility:** towards fellow human beings, towards future generations, towards nature and environment.
8. **Respect for life.**

In a similar vein, a suggested ethical guideline for marketing in a global context includes the following value loaded statements:

1. Practicing honest communication.
2. Enhancing human capabilities
3. Fostering creative cultural diversity.
4. Promoting sustainable growth and eco- friendly.

One hopes that such encouraging trends will gather greater momentum in the coming decades.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics studies the moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Environmental ethics has given a new dimension to the conservation of natural resources. Aldo Leopold, an American ecologist was influential in the development of modern environmental ethics.

Why environmental concern?

1. Most of the human activities lead to environmental pollution.
2. The overly increasing human population is increasing the human demand for resources like food and shelter.
3. As the population is exceeding the carrying capacity of our planet, natural environment are being used for human habitation.

Important Ethical Guidelines known as Earth ethics/Environmental ethics

1. The earth should exist for the benefit of humanity and we should love and respect the earth.
2. Humans should have some ethical obligations with respect to the natural world. We should celebrate the changes of its seasons.
3. We should not have the right to take all the earth's resources for our own use.

4. We should not hold our self above other living things and have no right to drive them to extinction. Other species have an intrinsic right to live.
5. We should believe in various religions and should follow what they say about humanity relationship to the rest of the living world.
6. We should be grateful to the plants and animals which nourish us by giving us food.
7. We should consume the material goods in moderate amount so that all may share the earth's precious treasure of resources. We should not waste our resources on destruction weapons.
8. We should not steal from future generation their right to live in a clean and safe planet by polluting it.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

India is the first country in the world to have provision for the protection and conservation of environment in its constitution. On 5 June 1972, environment was first discussed as an item of international agenda in the UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm and thereafter *5th June is celebrated all over the world as World Environment Day.*

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) ETHICS

Globalization and digital convergence in the emerging knowledge society has raised complex ethical, legal and societal issues. We are faced with complex and difficult questions regarding the freedom of expression, access to information, the right to privacy, intellectual property rights, and cultural diversity. ICT is an instrumental need of all humans for the gathering of information and knowledge, and as such, should be guaranteed as a basic right to all human beings. All over the world, rights that are already legally recognized are daily being violated, whether in the name of economic advancement, political stability, religious causes, the campaign against terrorism, or for personal greed and interests. Violations of these rights have created new problems in human social systems, such as the digital divide, cybercrime, digital security and privacy concerns, all of which have affected people's lives either directly or indirectly. Professional ethical issues can occur in developing any Information Technology system. However, the Internet and web allow many more people around the world to quickly connect to an IT system. As a result professionals are more likely to confront ethical issues when dealing with the Internet and the World Wide Web. Professionals may be called to account for their actions not only in their own country, but in any jurisdiction in the world.

Technology itself is neither good nor bad. For example an axe is a great tool for cutting wood or it can be nasty weapon. It is simply how people choose to use technology that can sometimes cause concern. One of the key issues in society is the balance to be struck between a citizen's right to privacy and governments' obligation to keep its country safe and secure. ICT has huge impact on this issue.

What is computer Ethics?

In general, ethics is a moral philosophy where a person makes a specific moral choice and sticks to it. On the other hand, ethics in computing means moral guidelines to refer to when using the computer and computer networks. This includes the internet. Computer ethics is a system of moral standards or values used as a guideline for computer users.

Conclusions

Ethical issues in ICT not only exist in sex, crime or hack, but also happen in another area of life (entertainment, education etc).It is difficult to face the bad ethical issues, but there are some ways to prevent the bad impact, such as:

1. Developing the awareness of users especially children under 18 years of age.
2. Protecting the unbehavioural sites etc.

The following methods are being increasingly proposed and implemented:

- Promoting awareness about professional ethics by introducing new courses, refresher programs and case studies.
- Administering oaths and prescribing codes of ethical conduct for specific professional disciplines
- Setting up mechanisms for intensive audit inspection and monitoring the activities
- Framing more stringent laws and devising harder punishments for offences
- Promoting transparency in working systems through mechanisms like RTI (right to information act), etc.
- Carrying out 'sting operations' and widely publicizing serious lapses in ethical conduct of profession through media.
- Encouraging whistle blowing by individuals or groups.
- Setting up vigilance commissions, ethics committees, tribunals, consumer protection forums etc.
- Filing public interest litigations etc.