

# Professional Ethics



## Introduction

Rajat and Meera are colleagues working in the same company. They are also in the same team and are working on the same project. One day, Meera confides in Rajat that she is going to quit the company after two months.

Rajat tried to persuade her not to take such kind of decision in haste, but from Meera's determination, he realized soon that she has already made up her mind. She requests him to not share this with anybody else as she hasn't mentioned it to anyone but him, and Rajat promised he won't.

After a week, Rajat was having an "off the record" conversation with his manager in the parking lot, where he came to know that the management is planning to offer a promotion to either Meera or Rajat; however, the decision is slightly leaning in favor of Meera. If Meera is out of the way, Rajat becomes the automatic choice for the job and he knows that she is going to quit.



Should Rajat keep quiet or tell the manager?

On one hand, he had promised her to keep quiet, although under different circumstances. On the other hand, she is leaving the company anyway, so telling would only ease up the process. **What would you have done?**

## What is Professional Ethics?

More often than not, professionals in a corporate environment face such dilemmas (as Rajat in the above example). Professional ethics examines the moral and ethical issues that arise in a corporate environment.

It has been found that a majority of professionals face ethical problems in their professional life, as compared to non-professionals, mainly because professionals are trained to provide services to the society that cannot be provided by non-professionals.

It is because of the services that professionals provide, they are also eligible for certain privileges and immunities. For example, a doctor is given the right to cut open a patient's body because he is trained to cure him of his illness, and is offered immunity from any negative repercussions if something untoward were to happen. Similarly, a police officer is given the right of carrying weapons and he can use them

to protect themselves or somebody else's life from imminent danger. Not everybody can operate upon someone and not everyone can protect you from the unsocial elements of the society.

Because of these added responsibilities and complicated scenarios, it's difficult to understand the way a person is expected to act under complex situations. Professional Ethics is a way to provide an answer to those difficult questions through extensive training, sharing real-life examples, and following the practices that makes a profession ethical.

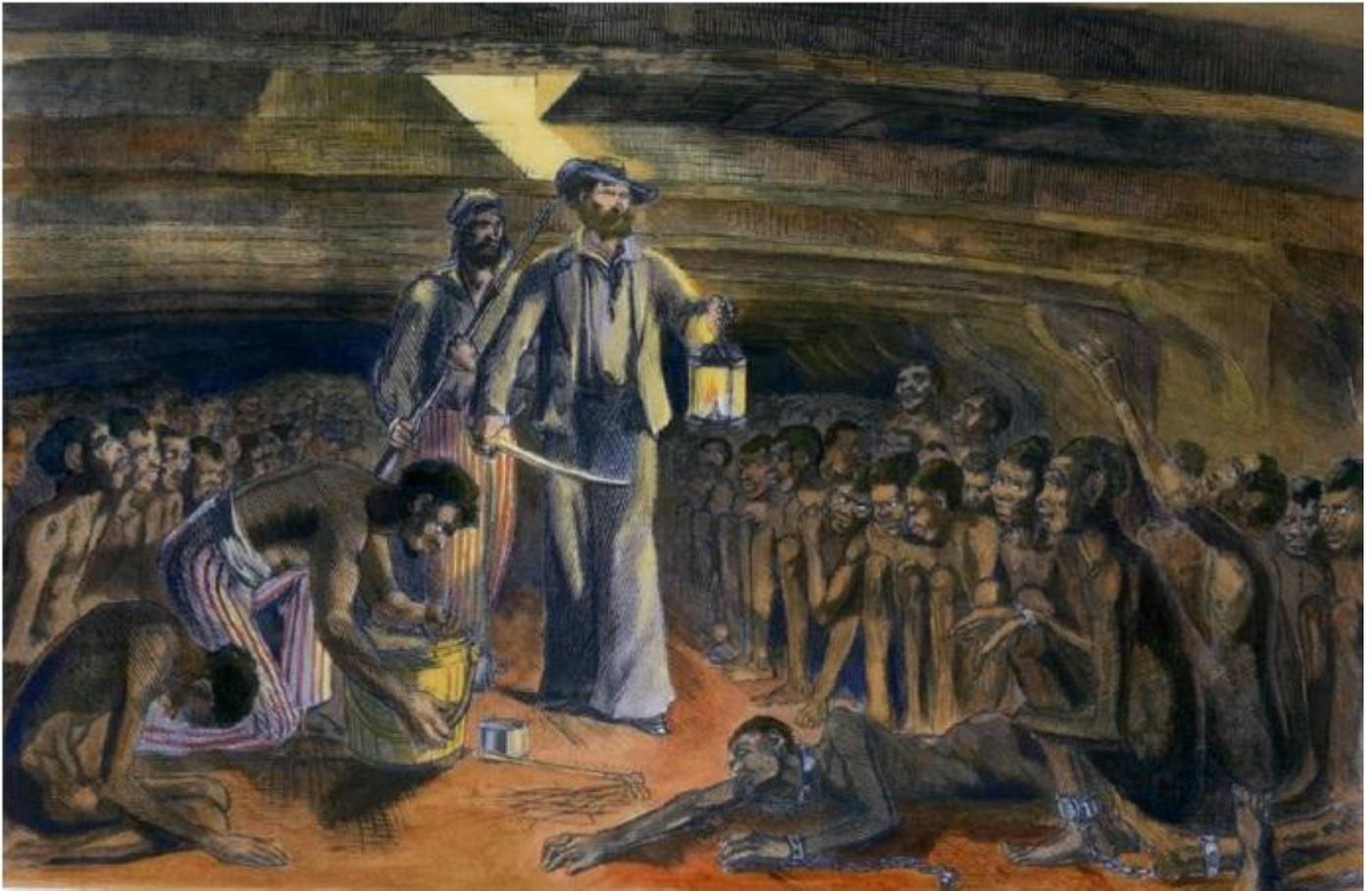
## Professional Ethics - Legal vs. Ethical

Many people confuse 'ethical' with 'legal'. **Legal** is the word used to define anything that concerns the law or its workings. It is applicable to all practices, languages, processes, procedures, cultures, and other relative concepts in a system of the law. On the other hand, **ethics** is the word used to define the traditional norms and morals of an individual.

Many of the existing laws have originated from ethics while ethics is rooted in morals and the perception of the rightness or wrongness of an act or conduct.

Any legal act is applicable to all people in a State that implements a particular set of laws. On the other hand, ethics is society specific. Two different societies located in a similar geo-political region definitely have one rule of law, but they may have two different ethics. For example, in India, there is one law applicable to every citizen, but possibly there are several ethics applicable to concerned society only.

However, both the terms – legal and ethical – are **spatio-temporal** and change with time and space. For example, there was a time when slavery was legally justified.



Many of you might agree that imprisoning free men and deporting them away from their lands and families were not at all ethical. Over a period of time, the law had been amended and redrafted to abolish slavery.

In other words, ethics emphasizes on the rights of living beings (on morality ground) and suggests it should not be violated by any means.

## Professional Ethics For Employees

The basic ethics a responsible and reliable employee practices are that he stays productive and takes responsibility for his actions, and that includes being accountable for the good or bad consequences of his actions.

In addition to this, qualities like being punctual, staying focused, and having an inclusive approach to problem-solving and decision-making are very important.

A professional should learn to take pride in the output he produces, lead by example, and address issues rather than crying over spilt milk.

A word of caution on inviting excessive friendliness runs through the management as an unwritten code. Many accept that there is a line that separates professional bonding and personal attachment that should be respected and never crossed. That

being said, there is still a strong emphasis on clear, precise communication with everyone in a company.

## Employee Ethics Worksheet

Ethics help us in deciding what is right and what is wrong and what price we will have to pay if we follow a wrong practice. Given below is a situation about an ethical dilemma **an employee might face** in a lucrative but potentially dangerous situation. The reader is suggested to read about the situation carefully and then answer the subsequent questions.

### Scenario

Rishabh Dash was employed for a year as an accountant with Agri Chemicals Pvt. Ltd., a fertilizer-manufacturing plant. After that, he applied for a job with QWERTY Solutions, a reputed company in Bengaluru. The requirement of the desired candidate profile is mentioned as "experience of 2-5 years in Accounting."

Rishabh didn't want to lose the opportunity of working with a renowned company and hence he falsely mentioned '3 years of working experience' on his resume. He got selected and quickly created a reputation of being a good performer. He was even "The Promising Employee of the Month" twice in the first six months.

One day, one of Rishabh's colleagues decided to collect some background information about him, out of pure jealousy. He went to Agri Chemicals and discovered the truth. Needless to say, he came back and spilled the beans.

Rishabh's supervisor was very disturbed on hearing this, as he had a very good impression about Rishabh, and was actually deciding to promote him so that he can share a few of the managerial responsibilities.

### Questions

- When Rishabh exaggerated his experience on his resume, do you think he must have feared that he would eventually be caught? What would you have done, if you were in a similar situation?

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- What would you have done if you had known the truth about Rishabh instead of his colleague? Explain your view.

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- If you were applying for a job and come across a similar scenario, would you be tempted to do the same as Rishabh did? Explain your view.
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## Professional Ethics For Employers

Companies have also started encouraging the cultivation and practice of good ethics on their workplaces by providing fair assessments to their employees, and sharing power and responsibility with them. There is a transparency in the way work responsibility is shared and how work is delegated. A lot of importance is given to clear communication, with exact instructions.

Companies periodically conduct trainings to enhance employees' knowledge and aptitude towards work. Sharing constructive feedback with employees and inviting their feedback are important steps that encourage an employee to think of the organization as a collective unit where teams are allotted specific responsibilities.

In a recent survey, it was found that the employees who had been encouraged to be ethical in business practices were much more loyal and productive. Not only that, they became the role-models for the entry-level employees and that helped them draw a positive recognition from all quarters. This resulted in their professional growth and expansion of decision-making powers.

## Employer Ethics Worksheet

Employers and employees share a "compensation-for-service" relationship where an employer pays an employee an already-agreed-upon fair pay in exchange of a fair job done.

The following scenario is from the **perspective of the employer**. The reader is instructed to employ his empathetic skills while trying to understand the manner in which this scenario raises a few questions on the workload of employed skill.

### Scenario

Shanti was employed with Sam Consultants Pvt. Ltd. as a receptionist. As the company was just starting up, Shanti had plenty of time left after attending to queries and interacting with the customers

After a few days, Shanti's supervisor noticed that most of the time, she used to be without work. Therefore, he assigned some additional responsibilities to her such as converting hard-copies to soft-copies and proof-reading of office documents. These additional responsibilities put an additional burden on Shanti. Now, she is overburdened with work. Resultantly, she was not able to finish the work on same day and hence her tasks are getting piled for the next day and so on.

Her supervisor thinks he is justified in his stance of giving Shanti more responsibilities, as he is paying her full dues as an employer to an employee.

## Questions

- Would your thoughts have been the same if you were the supervisor? Explain your view.

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- Does the supervisor's action justify the company or professional standards?

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- What would you have done, had you been the supervisor? Explain your view.

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## Professional Ethics In Profession

Earlier, the prevalent thought was that a company is just a place where people come together and function in a team to get certain desired results. In other words, companies are just like machines with various parts working together to produce a desired result, and hence the blame of the breakdown of this machine should lie with the defective parts and not the entire machine.

It has now been asserted through a detailed study of the working patterns of various companies that companies are not machines. On the contrary, they are more like human beings in their ability to collect data from each other to enhance their livelihood and respond to changes in their environment, taking decisions that impact the entire company.

Hence the term "company" is swiftly making way for "organization," which means the entire company works like a human body with different organs that are vital for its survival and prosperity.

## Professional Ethics Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to help you understand your moral dimensions and what motivates you to take the steps that you take in your life. The participant is expected to be honest while answering these questions, as this is a self-assessment of values.

### Values System

In the following table, what are the ten elements, you value the most?

Achievement		Friendship	
Affiliation		Community	
Possessions		Independence	
Creativity		Growth	
wealth		Curiosity	
status		Observational Skills	
Safety		Meaningful Work	
Enjoyment		Presentation Skills	
Fame		Challenges	
Competition		Orderliness	
Power		health	
Comfort		Inner Peace	

### Qualities System

Which ten of the following qualities do you cherish the most?

Integrity		Responsibility	
Compassion		Forgiveness	
Trustworthiness		Generosity	
Faith		Honesty	
Discipline		Obedience	
Courtesy		Friendliness	
Wisdom		Courage	
Loyalty		Kindness	
Cheerfulness		Perseverance	
Swift Decision-making		Humility	

## Belief System

Keeping the values and qualities that you selected above, write down twenty statements that explain what the ethics of a human being should be like and what qualities he should have and in which situation.

## Moral System

This exercise is designed for you to get an accurate analysis of your thought-mapping. Rate the following statements as per your assessment. Use the following scale –

1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Often 4 = Many times 5 = Always

Statements Chart		Ratings
1	I am sincere about my work.	
2	I try to be as truthful as I can.	
3	I am a genuine helping person.	
4	I do something if I promise to do it.	
5	I help my friends to achieve their goals.	
6	I am attentive to the needs of people I know.	
7	I am the first one to admit if I made a mistake.	
8	I believe we learn more from enemies than friends.	
9	I don't condone a wrong act and try to speak up if I can.	
10	I weigh my values and beliefs whenever I take any decision.	

11	I am dependable on keeping matters confidential, if it is needed.	
12	I believe that real the success comes with hard work and patience.	
13	I am genuinely happy on meeting with new people and making friends.	
14	I am tolerant to opinions other than my own.	
15	I do not blame others for the circumstances I have created for myself.	
16	I can clearly mention the objective and the belief that guide my actions.	
17	I respect everybody's right of viewing things from a different perspective.	
18	I know how to keep my temper in check if someone insults or ridicules me.	
19	I believe that everybody has the right to follow whichever religion he wants.	
20	I look for areas of improvement in me and take positive criticism sportingly.	

The 20 statements given above fall into 10 categories headed as (A-J). Enter the values you had assigned to the first 10 statements by putting the value of 1<sup>st</sup> question under the column A of the 1<sup>st</sup> row and so on.

For the next ten statements from 11–20, write their corresponding scores under A–J in the 2<sup>nd</sup> row. Now add the values as per corresponding columns (C1 + C2) and also add the values row-wise, i.e., values under A–J in a row.

Please note that the sum of columns will be equal to the sum of rows.

### Scorecard for Statements Chart

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Sum
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C1 (1-10)											Sum R1 (A-J)
C2 (10-20)											Sum R2 (A-J)
Sum (C1 + C2)											Sum (R1+R2)

## Scores for the 10 categories

Every column represents a quality that is found in people with proper business ethics. They are –

<b>A.</b>	Sincerity	<b>B.</b>	Faith
<b>C.</b>	Truthful	<b>D.</b>	Discipline
<b>E.</b>	Assertiveness	<b>F.</b>	Helpful
<b>G.</b>	Dependable	<b>H.</b>	Caring
<b>I.</b>	Responsible	<b>J.</b>	Respectful

Now check your scores and see in which column you got the highest score. That is your highest moral competency, and the column you got the lowest score is your lowest moral competency. When you are done, match your total to the rating scale mentioned below –

- **90-100** – Excellent ethical conduct
- **80-89** – Very good ethical conduct
- **70-79** – Good ethical conduct
- **Below 69** – Questionable ethical conduct

## Professional Ethics - Rights of an Employee

Employees are an asset to the company and any ethical organization would like its employees to be happy and prosperous by providing them a safe and happy working environment, steady work, reasonable modifications to work time, and a healthy work-life balance.

Many companies that top the chart when it comes to providing ideal environments to its employees credit their good employee management and retention programs as the key to their success.



An employee is, at the very least, entitled to the following rights at his workplace –

- No discrimination at work, especially on the basis of gender, nationality, religion, medical condition, and political affiliation.
- Healthy work-life balance, which means no long hours at work. Employees can also report if their employer makes unnecessary delays in delegating work.
- Protection of job for people with disabilities and medical conditions.
- Complete protection against sexual harassment of any kind and immunity from being forced to exchange favors for benefits.
- Freedom to discuss the terms and conditions of the employment with other employees and negotiating wages to suit lifestyle as per changing times.
- Right to ask for safe working conditions and reservation to answering questions on age, religion, nationality, and medical condition.

- Demanding certain changes and modifications regarding the working conditions to accommodate situations that might crop up due to their prevailing medical conditions.
- Right to form or participate a union that aims to improve the wages, lifestyle, working environment, and emphasizes on employee rights at the workplaces.

## Professional Ethics - Whistleblower Policy

Whistleblowers are those employees or ex-employees of a company who report their company's misdoings and expose the wrongful and unethical actions of their employer(s). Depending on the kind of whistleblowing they do, whistleblowers are categorized into the following two types –

- **Internal whistleblowers** – Internal whistleblowers report the unethical actions or illegal procedures of an employee or a group of employees of their company to someone who is a supervisor or senior authority in that company.
- **External whistleblowers** – External whistleblowers report the misgivings of their companies to external agencies. Most of the external whistleblowers come from huge corporations where the top management itself passes on unethical and at times, illegal directions to follow.

There are times when whistleblowers are also employees working with various other corporations, both local and international. Due to this, many whistleblowers are also categorized based on the organizations they come from. Depending on that, there are two types of whistleblowers –

- **Federal whistleblowers** – Federal whistleblowers work with government bodies and report cases that are related to national policies, etc. A recent case could be cited of **Mr Edward Snowden**, who used to work with NSA as a government contractor and reported NSA to be spying on people and tapping their phone calls.
- **Corporate whistleblowers** – Corporate whistleblowers work with private corporate houses and leak acts of cheating and fudging records and accounts to higher authorities.

Many big insurance houses in the past had been brought to task by ethical employees who didn't like the way the companies were functioning. One of the largest energy companies, **Enron**, from the US was brought to its knees by **Sherron Watkins**, who was the Vice President of the company and had reported massive irregularities in the accounting stages of various financial reports.



There are rules and provisions made for whistleblowers who report wrongdoing of their seniors in the company to either the authorities of the company or an external agency –

- A whistleblower need only report the wrongdoing. He doesn't need to investigate the unethical practices.
- Whistleblowers can request complete confidentiality, although sometimes, the identity of the whistleblower has to be made public to conduct a proper legal investigation.
- Whistleblowers are provided protection against any legal or illegal repercussion from employers, changes in terms of employment like assigning them poor assignment, lowering their salaries, or termination.

There are certain things that a whistleblower needs to be aware of. A whistleblower will not be guaranteed any immunity against his personal wrongdoings and for that he will be held accountable. Also, his motives for blowing the whistle need to be ethical and not to gain personal benefits.