

Ethics in construction industry



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Introduction

Construction is the largest industry in the world, benefiting all stakeholders. Improved productivity through virtuous collaborating will help in bringing to the owner a quality facility, in a shorter time, at lower cost. When we look to ethics in the area of construction quality, time and cost are the area of concern to focus. The architect/engineer focuses on the value-added design activity rather than spending effort to resolve a problem arise between the disappointed owners and the contractors. Contractors focus on their strengths of quality of work and efficient building execution in general.

The construction industry today has been built on the needs of the world's inhabitants to provide shelter, conquer distances, harness energy, create public spaces, protect from natural disasters, and build historical monuments. These basic human needs have not changed over time even though the process and environment in which the designer and constructor operate have become increasingly more complicated. Government regulations, environmental permits, and other bureaucratic controls continue to grow. Projects also continue to get larger and more technical, requiring more specialized people, high-tech equipment, and better control systems. This trend will require that tomorrow professionals have technical, business, organizational, ethical, and leadership know-how to complete their construction projects successfully, the key word being ethical.

In this dynamic world it is easy to lose track of what is right. The way the world is going, it requires a complete and much deserved effort from any business or professional if success is expected. In the midst of the struggle to become the best, there is an opportunity for unethical practices to emerge and hurt the industry. For the building and designing professions, the incalculable value of human life demands nothing less than the highest moral considerations from those who might risk it otherwise. Engineers, architects, project managers and contractors, therefore, have the fundamental right of professional conscience.

Ethics generally constitute

- “ 1. A system of moral principles, by which human actions and proposal may be judged well or bad, or right or wrong.
2. The rules of conduct recognized in respect of a particular class of human actions.
3. Moral principles, as of an individual”, (delbridge etal, 2000).

The general concepts of ethics are applicable in any area of organization, industry or profession. In this paper, we will try to see construction ethics in two major areas: Professionals in the Construction Industry and the businesses in it.

Professional Ethics and Construction

Professional ethics, for any profession is an important subject that describes a profession's ethical guideline that each member of a given profession

follows. Construction is vast field and contains many professionals in it like Civil Engineers, Architects, Contractors, Surveyors, Designers and Drafts Men. Each profession in the construction industry has ethical dilemma that requires due attention. Before describing the relationship between professional ethics and construction, we should fully understand what professional ethics means and thus it is the next point.

Professional Ethics

The professions have always been linked with the notion of ‘ service’. Thus, a profession has been described as a group of people organized to serve a body of specialized knowledge in the interests of society. Similarly, professions could be defined as “ occupations that both require advanced study and mastery of a specialized body of knowledge and undertake to promote, ensure or safeguard some matter that significantly affects others’ well-being”. A professional operates in a world of people with whom they work, colleagues and other specialists, and people whom they serve, such as their clients and the public.

Professionals are not exempt from the common ethical behaviors – such as obligations, duties and responsibilities – that are binding on ordinary people and are usually bound by a set of principles, attitudes or types of character dispositions that control the way the profession is practiced. This has been termed Professional Ethics, and concerns potential problems confronting members of a profession or group and their impact on society, with the implication that fairness should be attributed not only to clients but also colleagues and the public.

One important aspect is that of conflict of interest, defined as an interest which, if pursued, could keep professionals from meeting one of their obligations. Another is the relevant professional right termed the “ Right of Conscientious Refusal”, which is the right of an employee to refuse to partake in unethical conduct when forced to do so by an employer. This may occur in work or non-work situations and not necessary involve breaking the law. Conscientious Refusal may be done by either simply not participating in the activity that one sees as immoral, or it may be done with the hope of making a public protest that will draw attention to the situation that one believes is wrong.

Different professions, however, have different reputations insofar as ethical behaviors are concerned. In a recent public opinion survey conducted in Australia, for example, architects were rated superior in ethical behavior to lawyers, some doctors and almost all businessman and businesswoman; with the clergy being ranked the highest. Lawyers, it seems, are expected to prioritize their obligations to the client over their obligations to the public even if their client is guilty of committing a crime, regardless of how heinous the crime

Today, building professionals gain integrity and respectability to some extent through professional bodies. These are embodied in codes of practice, which define the roles and responsibilities of professionals and are the cornerstone of ethics program. Of course, codes alone are insufficient to ensure ethical conduct and they need to be complemented with the assignment of functional responsibility (e. g. ethics officer) and employer training.