

# Ethics and law



Topic: Lecturer: Presentation: Introduction Ethics and law are two significant components in the society. They guide the interrelationships between individuals and also enhance development. They need not be confused because they have a different meaning. Governments usually develop policies that are implemented under statutory arrangements to facilitate development. On the other hand, ethical practices are emphasized in a state to enhance harmonious relations and like the state laws, to enhance security and the general well-being of citizens. This paper evaluates the two components and explains the component among the two that better prepares a person for a career in the public service.

### Ethics and Law

According to Williams, law includes the codes of conducts that are developed and made obligatory by the authority for every member of the society or a particular group, state or community (p 51). The state sets punishments that are meted on individuals who contravene the codes of conduct. Laws are supposed to be adhered to regardless of their ethical connotation. A law abiding citizen enjoys his/her freedom regardless of whether the laws are suppressive. In other words, development of state laws is independent of the ethics. Ethics on the other hand is concerned with human behavior. It is about how people conduct themselves in the presence or absence of others. Tingle and Cribb view ethics as the moral values against which humans evaluate behavior (p 66). Generally, humans evaluate ethical behavior on the basis of doing to others what they would like to be done to them. This means that if a person hurts another, that is unethical because he/she would not like the same to occur to him/her. In contrast, the law seeks to protect the rights of individuals and the general public based on a common

understanding of what is good for them. For example, a government sets laws to protect the rights and freedoms of its citizens, which may not be granted in another state.

An officer in the public service is a servant of the state and hence the government. He/she is required to demonstrate professional ethics while undertaking his/her duties. On the other hand, he is obligated to the statutory duties that surpass his/her moral background. He/she is supposed to perform his/her duties according to the laws that govern the particular field. For example in some states, a parent who is convicted of dealing or using illegal drugs is denied parenting rights. The child or children are adopted as the parent serves the prison sentence. The judge who takes away parenting rights is guided by the law and can not use any other information to allow the parent to maintain the rights. However, he/she may clearly understand that reformed parents can bring up their children and that it is unethical to allow the adoption of children of a person who is alive and able to play his/her role as a parent. However, if the judge gives a ruling based on ethics, he may end up losing the job by doing contrary to the statute. For this reason, a public servant needs to understand the law and always act according to what it stipulates (Kerridge et al. 57). Generally, law prepares a person better for a career in the public service than ethics.

The link that exists between ethics and law is that both are intended to maintain harmony among the people. For example, it is unethical to steal other people's property while on the other hand the law protects individual property and defines the forms of punishment that may be applied for the law breakers. However, there sometimes happens to be a misunderstanding when some unethical practices are legalized. Nader and Mattei cite the case

of legalization of “ marijuana” in some states as unethical because of the known side effects (p 71). Many other situations generate conflict as regards the link between law and ethics, such as legalization of abortion in some countries whereas it goes against ethical standards.

### Conclusion

Law means the codes of conduct that have been made obligatory by the authority for every person in a particular community or state. On the other hand, ethics includes the standards that act as the basis of evaluating human behavior. For a person aspiring to work in the public service, understanding the law prepares him/her better than ethics. Both law and ethics are intended to help in maintaining harmonious relations among people. However, some actions may be legal but unethical.

### References

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