

CHAPTER 15

Ethics and professionalism in public relations



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- articulate why ethical practice and professionalism is important
- describe the various ethical traditions and theories and apply them to public relations situations
- analyse the responsibilities that practitioners have to self, organisation, profession and society and identify potential conflicts
- describe some of the typical public relations dilemmas facing practitioners and point to appropriate resolutions
- construct principles on which to build an ethical framework based on 'current' theory and practice
- choose and use ethical decision-making models.

Structure

- Importance of ethics and professionalism in public relations
- Definitions of ethics and morality
- Ethical theories (traditions)
- Duty to whom?
- Ethical issues in public relations
- Ethical decision-making models and their application

Introduction

Recent corporate and political scandals, such as Enron, Worldcom, Parmalat and the UK government's presentation of its case for war in Iraq, have brought ethics very much into the spotlight.

In recognition of this, fresh attention has been given to business ethics in general and corporate responsibility (CSR) in particular (see Chapters 6 and 18) and to the process and practice of government communication. At the same time, certain activities in the media have also come in for censure. For example, the quest for celebrity information (and the dubious means by which it is obtained) and the publishing of fake photographs of Iraqi prisoner abuse by the UK national tabloid newspaper *The Daily Mirror* have called into question media ethics.

Communication is at the heart of all these issues. It is a matter of some concern that although professional communicators are frequently faced with ethical decisions or are asked to represent an organisation when there is an ethical problem, very few have had formal ethics training or can articulate the processes they go through when arriving at difficult ethical decisions. It is also worth noting that the media relish covering news stories that focus on corporate or public relations practitioner ethics and (un)ethical behaviour.

This chapter examines ethics and professionalism. It looks at the various ethical traditions and professional codes of conduct, at the responsibilities of communication professionals and it provides some models for sound ethical decision making.

Importance of ethics and professionalism in public relations

There are many reasons why ethics and professionalism should characterise public relations practice, but just five are explored here.

Trust

Public relations is about building and maintaining relationships. Trust is the key to successful relationships. Dictionary definitions of trust usually include words like reliability, confidence, faith and integrity. Trust is a precious thing, given by one individual to another and once broken, it can rarely be fully restored. If a public relations practitioner acts ethically and professionally they are likely to be trusted. They will be described as having integrity – there is something wholesome, honest and trustworthy about them. Being ethical and professional is core to having a good reputation.

It is important for an organisation to be represented by someone who is ethical and professional. It says something about the values and character of the organisation itself. Stakeholders are more likely to trust the organisation and believe what it says if the person representing it is regarded as trustworthy.

The ethical guardian

There is much debate about the role of the practitioner as the guardian of the organisation's ethics. For example, L'Etang (2003) does not see much evidence for this. However, others such as Heath and Ryan (1989) argue that a part of the role of public relations practitioners is to monitor the environment to detect various publics' attitudes to certain values. They should then make company managers aware of external ethical standards and help companies implement CSR programmes or develop codes of ethics. Cutlip et al. (2000) argue that an organisation's conduct is improved when public relations practitioners stress the need for public approval.

What cannot be denied is that public relations people have to justify the decisions and actions of their organisation to a range of publics. They should have, therefore, an acute awareness of what their publics' likely reactions will be and whether there will be a sense of moral outrage or approval. They then need the courage to challenge potential decisions and actions as they are being made and before they become reality. For example, there is increasing disquiet about senior managers being given 'golden goodbyes'

(cash or equivalent payments) when their company is in difficulties, at the same time that other employees are being made redundant or having minimal pay increases. In such a situation, it is imperative that the public relations professional challenges the decision on moral and ethical grounds – even if there are legal reasons why the payment may have to be made to senior managers.

Social responsibility

Gone are the days when organisations were regarded as just economic entities whose sole responsibility was to make profits (Friedman 1970). Organisations are regarded as having wider responsibilities to society and the CSR movement has come about largely because organisations have recognised they have responsibilities towards all stakeholding groups, to the environment and to society as a whole. Ongoing MORI research (MORI 2004) demonstrates quite clearly that organisations increasingly have to respond to stakeholder demands that they fulfil their social responsibilities. Earlier research for the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) (MORI 2002) shows that public relations practitioners are usually responsible for communicating CSR policies and activities; indeed, CSR is often placed within the public relations remit (see Chapters 6 and 18).

Community building and conflict resolution

Linked to the idea of social responsibility is the notion of community building and conflict resolution. This debate around the ideal of community has been stimulated by the *communitarian* movement associated with the American sociologist Amitai Etzioni (see following definition box). To function properly, democracy must reflect an open society that is constantly challenging and reappraising its assumptions and values. Public relations brings to the public debate all kinds of ideas and represents all shades of opinion. As a result of informed debate, collective decisions can be made, citizens accept the democratic will and society and community is built. As Kruckeberg and Starck (1998: 53) say:

A community is achieved when people are aware of and interested in common ends and regulate their activity in view of those ends. Communication plays a vital role as people try to regulate their own activities and to participate in efforts to reach common ends.

Furthermore, public relations builds community by helping to resolve conflict. By engaging in dialogue, understandings can be reached and accommodations

**box
15.1****Examples of public relations professional bodies**

The following are examples of professional bodies for public relations in different countries:

- FERPI in Italy
- MIPR in Malaysia
- PRISA in South Africa
- PRINZ in New Zealand
- PRSA in America
- CIPR in the UK

made that allow opposing factions to live together with a measure of tolerance. It is worth noting that public relations practitioners have been involved in conflict resolution work in Northern Ireland for many years.

Definition: *Communitarianism* supports building community structures so that people take a shared responsibility for what happens to them (Etzioni 1995). People should take a collective, mutually supportive responsibility for each other through local community institutions.

professional body (see Box 15.1), ascribe to its code of conduct and strive to go beyond the minimum requirements. That in itself is an indicator of the seriousness with which they take their own professional calling. It is right and proper that organisations expect the highest standards from their communicators, just as they would from their corporate lawyers or accountants. (See Think about 15.1.)

Definitions of ethics and morality**Power and obligation**

As has been said, trust depends to a large extent on the integrity of individual practitioners. As Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) assert, one of the reasons public relations is subject to so much scrutiny is because it is so powerful and influential. The criticism is that it works too well! (See also Chapter 14, which discusses persuasion and propaganda.)

With power and influence comes responsibility. There is an obligation on practitioners to be as professional as possible. That means taking education and training as seriously as other professions, such as accountancy, law, medicine, building surveying, pharmacy or architecture. Intellectual training, mastery of the technical aspects of the job, management knowledge and ethical training are all important. Practitioners should be members of the appropriate

So, having given some reasons why ethics and professionalism are important, it is now necessary to clarify some terms.

There is confusion about the words '*morals*' and '*ethics*'; indeed they are often used interchangeably. Strictly speaking, morals are to do with the individual. From being small children we become aware of what is good and what are regarded as right actions. Fairly quickly we get an impression of what it means to be a 'bad' person. That awareness comes from parents, our own thinking and feeling about a situation or person, and from the group and society we are based in. Morals are described simply as our personal *values* or principles. So we speak of people having their own moral code, which might be different from ours. For example, someone with religious beliefs may believe abortion is immoral; someone else in the same society or even the same family will not.

think about 15.1**Ethics and professionalism**

- Can you think of other reasons why ethics and professionalism are important in public relations?
- Do you have an image of public relations as an ethical profession? If not, why not?

Feedback Ethical professionalism is important because it:

- minimises risk to individuals and organisation
- increases standing of the professional
- is right in itself.

Definition: *Morals* are personal values or principles that guide behaviour. *Ethics* are systematic frameworks which codify moral principles. Values are those factors that are important to the individual, e.g. fairness, truth, honesty, acquiring wealth, having status.

Ethics, on the other hand, means the formal study and codification of moral principles into systematic frameworks so that decisions can be made about what is right and wrong in a reasoned and structured way. Hence, certain parts of the law are obviously framed to support standards of behaviour that have a strong moral basis – for example, the laws on theft and murder.

Trevino and Nelson (2004: 15) make a very clear link between morals and business ethics within organisations (see Figure 15.1). They explain that ethical decision making in organisations comprises ‘three basic steps: moral awareness (recognising the existence of an ethical dilemma), moral judgement (deciding what’s right) and ethical behaviour (taking action to do the right thing)’. These steps are influenced by the characteristics of both the individual and the organisation.

McElreath (1997) points out that ethics, as a branch of philosophy, is not just about right and wrong; it is about what is good and what is bad. He quotes public relations Professor Don Wright (Wright 1982) who says that ethics is really about being good and that the practitioner’s task is to determine what a good action is. Some actions such as honesty, sincerity and truthfulness are essentially good in themselves. Indeed, it was Aristotle who claimed that people can become virtuous by practising the virtues (or, in modern parlance, become good by practising goodness).

The purpose of learning about ethics – frameworks of principles – is so that situations can be evaluated

systematically, which encourages consistent behaviour and responses to situations. This is important because consistency is also a key element in building relationships. Being able to explain how and why we have reached a particular decision makes it transparent and understandable, even if the decision itself is unpopular.

Ethical theories (traditions)

Having looked at the connection between morals and ethics, it is now appropriate to look at some of the main frameworks that seek to provide a rational basis for moral judgements and ethical behaviour and at the implication of some of these theories for public relations.

Cognitivism and non-cognitivism

The most basic question that ethical theorists ask is, ‘Is it possible to know right from wrong?’

The word used by philosophers to define the view that there are *actual* and *objective* moral truths and absolutes is *cognitivism*. Cognitivism enables us to make firm statements about whether an action or belief is good or bad, right or wrong. The opposing school of thought, *non-cognitivism*, states that morality is purely *subjective*, or is bound up with the specific cultural context of individuals. Non-cognitivists say that there are no moral absolutes, only beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

This later, non-cognitivist school of thought, which draws heavily on the work of Kenneth Burke (1969a; 1969b), is represented in the public relations literature by rhetorical theorists such as Pearson (1989), Toth and Heath (1992) and Heath (2001). They argue that truths emerge from a process of dialogue, negotiation and debate where individuals eventually agree on a particular moral truth. They assert that the *process* by which the debate is conducted determines whether it is ethical or not. In this way, Pearson argues that public relations ‘plays a major role in managing the moral dimension of corporate conduct’ (1989: 111). The equity of the process means that people reach a valid consensus, which then has moral authority.

Indeed, they place great stress on the rules for ethical dialogue to maintain its integrity and validity. Habermas (1984) has provided useful insights into what he calls an ideal communication situation. In essence, this requires that participants should test and probe ideas that are proposed, have equal freedom to initiate and continue dialogue, to set the discussion agenda and to challenge and/or explain. In

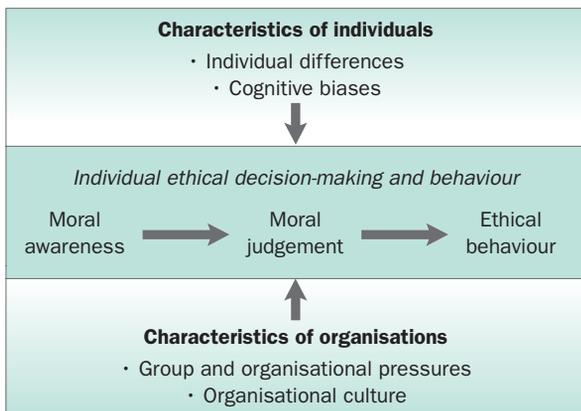


FIGURE 15.1 Ethical decision making in organisations (source: Trevino, L.K. and Nelson, K.A. (2004) *Managing Business Ethics*, 3rd Edition, p. 15. Copyright (c) 2004 John Wiley & Sons. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)



PICTURE 15.1 Recent corporate and political scandals, such as Enron, have brought ethics very much into the spotlight. (Source: AFP/Getty Images.)

order to do this properly, they must have freedom from manipulation and equality of power. In turn, all those that participate in dialogue become accountable for comprehensibility (ensuring they are understood), truth (factual accuracy), rightness (appropriate to those receiving the communication) and truthfulness (sincerity as well as factual accuracy). For rhetoricians there is almost agnosticism about who wins the argument eventually, as long as the process has integrity.

This view is regarded by many as an ideal to aspire to, but not grounded in reality. As Somerville (2001) points out, although the centrality of dialogue is an attractive proposition, power is a major issue. It is simply not the case that all participants in a dialogue are equal. In addition, dialogue cannot go on indefinitely and the resolution of the point under discussion may not have the agreement of everyone – it may suit the majority, but others may be profoundly opposed.

The value of Pearson's argument is that it promotes the notion that participants have equal value and

they are not to be used as a means to an end. In other words, he does protect the 'rights' of individuals to have a voice and having a voice accords them some respect. Giving respect is itself a moral action.

Pearson's approach is supported by other public relations academics in the rhetorical school such as Heath. The point being made by them is that there are no absolute or objective standards of right and wrong. There are only subjective views of what is right and wrong and it is only through dialogue and agreement that moral rules can be arrived at. Communication therefore is a deeply ethical function because it is through it that agreement on right corporate behaviour is reached.

However, most people live their lives on the basis that there are objective standards of good and bad, right and wrong. Cognitivist ethical theories form the bulk of the literature and provide the foundation for most modern approaches to business and personal ethical frameworks. The following section outlines the main schools of thought in cognitivist theory.

Definition: *Cognitivism* is used by philosophers to define the view that there are *actual* and *objective* moral truths and absolutes (i.e. we can make firm statements one way or another about whether something is good or bad, right or wrong).

Definition: *Non-cognitivism* states that morality is purely *subjective* or is bound up with the specific cultural context of individuals. Non-cognitivists say that there are no moral absolutes, only beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

Consequentialist theories

Consequentialist theories focus on the *results* or consequences of behaviour. This is often known as the teleological approach, deriving from the Greek words *telos* (end) and *logos* (the study of). Hence teleology is the study of ends. The best known consequentialist theory is *utilitarianism*, which holds that actions must be judged by the effects that they have, in other words, by their utility. Thus decision makers must consciously consider the impact of their actions. A right action is one that causes more benefit (or happiness) than harm. Indeed, ethical decisions should positively seek to maximise benefits and minimise harm in society.

However, there are three major problems with utilitarianism. The first is that it assumes you can predict the consequences of your actions accurately and then make a judgement. In reality this is often not the case: there are situations when just obtaining the facts is difficult enough. For example, if you work for a construction company whose client wants to build a new road through an urban area, would you really

know how everyone involved would be affected or what the long-term impact would be? Furthermore, public relations practitioners are usually working under time pressures and it is simply not possible to find out. Pragmatic decisions within tight timescales have to be made.

The second major problem is that there can be conflicting benefits and the simple reality is that more weight is given to the views or interests of some stakeholders, whether they are in the majority or not, than others. So, for example, some managers may argue that corporate giving, which is good in itself, has to be limited in order to provide shareholders with a handsome dividend to retain their investment and loyalty.

The third argument against utilitarianism is that it leads to ‘ends justifies means’ thinking. So utilitarians would say it is acceptable to lie about the state of the company’s research and development programme to preserve the jobs of thousands of employees. ‘Ends justifies means’ thinking can also lead to the sacrificing of individuals or groups for ‘the greater good’. Therefore the displacement of indigenous groups so that land can be farmed is argued as ethical because the food produced is used to support the needs of larger communities who need food – the greater number benefit. (See Table 15.1 for a comparison of the theories.)

Non-consequential theories

The second set of cognitivist theories are *non-consequentialist*. This is often known as the deontological approach deriving from the Greek word *deontos* meaning duty.

Deontology is a duty-based ethic and focuses on obligation, principles and rights. It emphasises the duty of human beings to treat others with dignity and respect because they are human beings with rights. Deontologists believe that actions in and of themselves can be judged as right or wrong. They base their decision making on universal principles or values that transcend time or cultural perspectives. Josephson (1993) has identified 10 universal principles that form the basis of ethical life:

- 1 honesty
- 2 integrity
- 3 promise keeping

- 4 fidelity
- 5 fairness
- 6 caring for others
- 7 respect for others
- 8 responsible citizenship
- 9 pursuit of excellence
- 10 accountability.

Both the UN’s (United Nations) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (www.un.org/overview/rights.html) and the US Declaration of Independence (www.law.indiana.edu/uslawdocs/declaration.html) subscribe to deontological principles by guaranteeing that individuals have certain rights that should not be violated, such as the right to life, liberty, security and equality before the law. It is the duty of society and of individuals to preserve these rights.

Some deontologists focus more on the duties that a person should discharge rather than their rights. They argue that rights can only be preserved when citizens take their duties seriously. As Cambridge philosopher Onora O’Neil said in her BBC Reith Lecture of 2002: ‘Individuals have often been willing, even eager, to claim their rights but much less willing to meet their duties to respect others rights’ (O’Neil 2002).

Deontology is closely associated with eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who devised the principle of the *categorical imperative*. This encouraged people to ask themselves if their action was suitable for translation into a universal law or principle that anyone faced with the same situation could follow. Thus, if you tell a lie to get yourself out of a difficult situation, the categorical imperative would demand you ask yourself ‘is lying in these circumstances a principle everyone should adopt?’ A deontologist decides what the moral law is by applying the universal principles such as those of Josephson quoted earlier. Many deontologists also adopt what is called ‘the golden rule’. This is enshrined in many religions in phrases such as, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’.

Definition: *Categorical imperative* is a test that can be applied to see if it conforms to the moral law. If the action could be made into a universal law, which would be regarded as acceptable if applied to everyone faced with the same situation, then it would be regarded as ethical.

TABLE 15.1 Consequentialist vs non-consequentialist cognitivist theories

Theory	Consequentialist (result of behaviour – the effect it has)	Non-consequentialist (duty – obligations, principles and rights)
Name	Teleological	Deontological
Theoretical example	Utilitarianism	Categorical imperative (Kant)

There are three main problems with deontological reasoning. The first concerns what happens if two moral laws clash. For example, you may have a moral duty to tell the truth, but you also have a moral duty to care for others. So what do you decide if a journalist asks you to confirm the name of an employee who has had an accident at work before their family has been informed – which law do you obey?

The second is that Kant says you must fulfil your moral obligation irrespective of the consequences. So, for example, Kant would say that you must tell the truth, even if someone suffers as a result.

The third problem is that there is no agreement about what the moral law is. Societies develop and moral perspectives change or differ from society to society. European culture would hold that executing a murderer is not acceptable. Mainstream North American culture believes that ‘a life for a life’ is a moral imperative.

Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics look more at the motivations of an individual rather than at their actions per se or the consequences of their actions. Character is all important. This does not mean that principles or consequences are unimportant, but they are considered in the light of the individual’s character. For example, did the individual act honestly? Did they follow a principle, such as their professional code of conduct? Did they attempt to do no harm?

Character is, of course, difficult to define and it is intimately bound up with the community an individual inhabits. Bravery in one community may be regarded as barbarity in another. For public relations practitioners this requires a detailed examination of the communities they inhabit. You may be a church-goer, belong to a professional association or work in a company that has a business code of ethics. In any situation you should ask which community would have the highest standards and then apply those rules. Being a virtuous public relations practitioner also means that you abide by the highest standards of the professional institute that represents the community of public relations practitioners.

The value of virtue ethics is that it allows you to take on board appropriate standards without having to go through all the teleological or deontological arguments for yourself. The idea is that you draw on the wisdom of your peers who will have done the hard thinking on your behalf.

The two problems with virtue ethics are first that your ‘community’ might not have thought about your situation and, second, your ‘community’ might not have got it right. This can be a particular issue when public relations practitioners are working

overseas and they try to apply their ethnocentric principles in other cultures. However, a useful rule of thumb to apply when considering virtue ethics and the norms of a community is the ‘disclosure rule’. That is, ‘would I feel comfortable if my behaviour appeared on the front page of the local newspaper or if my family knew I’d done this?’

Situational ethics

There is one other school of thinking that is worth exploring and which, according to Pratt (1993), is prevalent in public relations practice in the USA. Situational ethics asserts that no moral law or principle is absolute; indeed the situation itself alters the rules. Therefore, part of our moral responsibility is to put aside the rules for the greater good and do whatever the situation demands. At first this seems a sensible and pragmatic approach: modern life is so complex that it is difficult to come up with rules that can be applied across the board. However, it is not that easy. If a system of ethics depends on situations or contexts and each one is different, it loses the value of being systematic. We may as well say that ethics as such do not matter; everyone can run their life by merely considering what is happening in the current situation. However, there is a big difference between situational ethics and considering the situation when making ethical decisions. It is worth explaining this further as Martinson (1998) does (see Activity 15.1, overleaf). Modern ethical theory states that three determinants must be considered to decide whether an action is ethical:

- the act itself of what one does (the object)
- the motives, why one does it (the end)
- the circumstances, or how, where, when, etc. one does it.

So if a practitioner holds a press conference, the act (object) itself is morally neutral. If the motive is to provide accurate information then the act and the motive are ethical. If the motive is to mislead, then the entire action is unethical. In circumstances where the situation (or context) is also neutral, the discussion can end there.

Most people who work in public relations have not been trained in moral philosophical systems and this has led Ryan and Martinson (1984: 27) to suggest that:

If public relations has adopted any underlying principle, it is possibly the subjectivism (or individual relativism) theory that each individual must establish his or her own moral baseline . . . The only real constraint is that an individual be able to live with an action – at least for the short-term.

(See Think about 15.2, overleaf.)

activity 15.1**Theory in practice**

Martinson (1998) gives a case where circumstances do play a significant part. A college wants to dismiss a sports coach because of financial misjudgements. They 'allow' the coach to resign voluntarily and take another job in the college. The coach agrees to this. The college director tells the public relations person to announce the resignation, but say nothing about the circumstances. How should the public relations person respond when a local journalist asks for the 'real reason' for the resignation?

Take the same situation, but this time the problem is the coach has a drug addiction and he has been stealing funds to support his habit. What does the practitioner do now when asked for the 'real reasons'?

Feedback

In the first case, many people would say disclosure of additional facts is not appropriate. Promises have been made to the coach and there are limits to the public's

'right to know'. It is dubious that in this case the 'whole truth' is necessary. Some would argue that disclosure is the best policy and it is in the public interest that people know if public funds have been misused. In this context there is a genuine but reasoned argument for and against further disclosure to the press.

However, in the second example things are quite different. The coach's behaviour was illegal and his actions could endanger the well-being of others. In this circumstance it would be difficult to justify withholding the information.

The situations are different, but the ethical platform is clear – to communicate truthfully to those who have a right and a need to know and to act in the public interest. The principle can be universalised (deontological perspective) and the greater good for the greatest number (teleological perspective) is satisfied. This is very different from saying that moral principles do not apply and that the situation must dictate our response.

Duty to whom?

Having considered various ethical frameworks, it is now time to look at the individual practitioner and examine the obligations that they have. One of the most difficult things for practitioners is reconciling the sometimes conflicting loyalties and duties that they have. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) identify four categories of duty (see Figure 15.2).

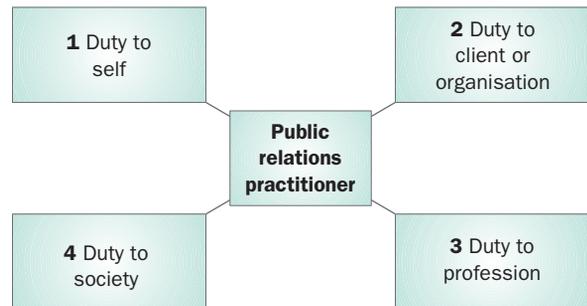


FIGURE 15.2 Loyalties and duties of practice (source: based on Seib and Fitzpatrick 1995)

Duty to self

Practitioners should first look at their own value system and personal ethical codes. This requires detailed thought and is not always easy to do. Personal ethical codes will dictate whether they can work for certain organisations or undertake particular types of activity. In the final resort, career choices and resignations are based on practitioners taking seriously their duty to maintain their own ethical standards.

Duty to client or organisation

Having decided to take the financial reward, many practitioners believe their primary duty is to their

clients or organisations. Despite their own personal codes, they believe it to be their professional duty to represent their organisation to the best of their ability, rather like a lawyer represents a client or a doctor treats a person whose personal beliefs they oppose.

There are objections to the legal parallel. In the sphere of public debate there is no judge to oversee fair play and there is no trained opponent with a guaranteed voice who can marshal alternative views and interpretations. Big organisations have vast resources, are generally more powerful and sometimes act to suppress opposing voices. Furthermore, when

think about 15.2 Which philosophical approach?

Which philosophical approach is most attractive to you? Utilitarianism, duty ethics, virtue ethics or situational ethics? List three reasons why.

lawyers defend clients they do not condone their client's crime. In the case of public relations, organisational actions in themselves are defended and practitioners are directly associated with those actions because they are often employees or are retained specifically to defend the actions of an organisation (Martinson 1999). Lawyers are participating in the *process* of justice, which demands representation for the accused. In legal cases a defendant has a *right* to a defence; organisations do not have similar rights. They can *request* services from those willing to offer them.

Conversely, some practitioners regard it as their duty to bring all the facts to the public debate even if they may be under pressure not to do so. Regulated animal laboratories are legal enterprises and it is fair and proper that in open and democratic societies they should be able to put their case in a persuasive way. It is then up to the public to make up their own minds having had both sides of the argument explained to them. Democracy is about informed citizens making informed choices.

While there may be professional disagreements about whether a company should be represented, condoning activities that constitute a risk to others is not acceptable. Practitioners who knowingly support harmful activities violate their wider duty to society and this higher duty must take precedence. For example, defending the harvesting of scarce resources for profit alone is not acceptable.

Duty to profession

It can be assumed that a practitioner has a duty to support their profession and their professional colleagues. In this way common standards of behaviour can be agreed and the bounds of acceptable practice established. Very important here are the professional codes of conduct (see Appendices 1 and 2 for the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations and the Global Alliance codes). These encapsulate principles of ethical practice and provide the basic standards for practitioners. It is a tough decision to argue with an insistent client or employer, but at a minimum, the codes will alert them to the fact they are asking the practitioner to act unethically and will provide the practitioner with tangible support for an argument against taking a particular course of action.

Although it is often the case that organisations will *wish* their public relations practitioners to be a member of a professional body, some organisations *require* those public relations practitioners who contact them on behalf of others to ascribe to a code of conduct. Box 15.2, overleaf, displays the EU Code, which applies to

all public affairs practitioners who represent organisations or clients. (See Box 15.2, overleaf.)

Duty to society

At the beginning of most public relations codes of conduct is a statement that the practitioner's primary responsibility is to society or to the public interest. While this is a noble aspiration, it is a complex one to unpack. First of all, what is society? Is it local, national, international? What about the cultural values and loyalty differences? And what does 'in the public interest' mean? (See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of the 'public interest'.) Clearly it is impossible to serve everyone's interests all the time, and interests are sometimes in conflict.

Grunig and Hunt (1984), Bivins (1993) and the rhetorical school of public relations (see Chapter 8) would argue that symmetric public relations, or genuine dialogue, is at the heart of the public interest. By engaging in dialogue, public relations encourages public and informed debate, clarity of argument is facilitated, good democratic decisions can be made and communities are reinforced. This is all in the public interest.

Another way to look at this in practical terms is to ask if your actions harm anyone and, more positively, whether you are making a valuable contribution that will enable people to live more informed and/or better lives. (See Think about 15.3, overleaf.)

Ethical issues in public relations

Bearing in mind these various, and sometimes conflicting duties, it is now appropriate to look at some of the areas where public relations practitioners encounter ethical problems.

Competence

If public relations describes itself as a 'profession', then there are obligations laid on it to provide expert, objective advice of the highest possible standard. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) describe two areas of concern in the provision of professional services – *malfeasance* and *incompetence*. Malfeasance is providing services that should not be provided. So, for example, dentists should not, normally, remove healthy teeth. Similarly public relations people should not conduct campaigns they know will be ineffective or which are unnecessary. This is sometimes a tough call when there is money to be made or if another consultancy is

**box
15.2****EU Code of Conduct**

This code of conduct applies to public affairs practitioners (see Chapter 23 for further details and definitions) dealing with EU institutions.

European affairs professionals are a vital part of the democratic process, acting as a link between the world of business and civil society and European policy makers. As such, these professionals must undertake to observe the highest of professional standards. SEAP, the Society of European Affairs Professionals, aims to provide guidance thereon, by setting high standards. The SEAP code of conduct is the result of thorough discussions by SEAP members. It commits members to the rules laid down therein, sets standards and acts as a benchmark for all European affairs professionals and encourages third parties to respond to SEAP with their views on the code.

In their dealings with the EU institutions, European affairs professionals shall:

Article 1 – General Principles

- (1) Act with honesty and integrity at all times, conducting their business in a fair and professional manner. They shall treat all others – including colleagues and competitors, as well as staff, officials or members of the EU institutions – with respect and civility at all times.
- (2) European affairs professionals shall not exert improper influence on staff, officials or members of the EU institutions.

Article 2 – Transparency and Openness

- (1) maintain the highest standards of professionalism in conducting their work with the EU institutions. When dealing with the institutions they shall be open and transparent in declaring their name, organisation or company, and the interest they represent (subject always to the requirements of commercial confidentiality);
- (2) neither intentionally misrepresent their status nor the nature of their inquiries to the EU institutions nor create any false impression in relation thereto;
- (3) take all reasonable steps to ensure the truth and accuracy of all statements made or information provided by them to the EU institutions;
- (4) not disseminate false or misleading information either knowingly or recklessly, and exercise proper care to avoid doing so inadvertently. They shall not obtain any information from the EU institutions by illicit or dishonest means.

Article 3 – Confidentiality

- (1) honour confidential information and embargoes and always abide by the rules and conventions for the obtaining, distribution and release of all EU documentation;
- (2) not sell for profit to third parties copies of documents obtained from the EU institutions.

Article 4 – Conflicts of interest

- (1) avoid any professional conflicts of interest. Should a conflict of interest arise, the SEAP member must take swift action in order to resolve it.

Article 5 – Employment of EU personnel

- (1) when employing former staff, officials or members of the EU institutions, take all the necessary measures to comply with the rules and regulations laid down by the EU institutions in that respect, in particular with regard to confidentiality.

Article 6 – Financial inducements

- (1) not offer to give, either directly or indirectly, any financial inducement to any official, member of staff or members of the EU institutions, except for normal business hospitality.

SEAP members shall uphold this code and all internal related procedures. In this respect, they shall co-operate fully with fellow members.

SEAP members agree not to engage in any practice or conduct that could be in any way detrimental to the reputation of SEAP or public affairs professionals in general.

Signatories accept that SEAP can apply a range of sanctions in case of non-compliance, ranging from a verbal warning to expulsion.

A list of signatories can be found on the SEAP website – www.seap.eu.org or by contacting SEAP

As adopted 23rd November 2004

think about 15.3 Prioritising interests

Describe one example from recent news stories where you think an organisation has put its own interests above those of society.

Feedback Examples of news stories where an organisation has put its interests before those of society include:

- dumping of toxic waste near residential areas
- large increases in director salaries while closing down factories in economically depressed areas
- moving operations to countries where there are less stringent employee safety regulations and putting those employees at risk (e.g. stripping out dangerous toxins from recycled materials without adequate protection).

willing to do this work, especially if a consultancy wishes to protect the jobs of its employees.

Incompetence means that the practitioners undertaking the work do not have the necessary knowledge or experience to undertake the work to the highest professional standards. It is tempting for consultancies to expand their business into areas where they have no expertise if a lucrative client has work to offer!

The UK CIPR Code of Conduct in its section on integrity, competence and maintaining professional standards is very clear that only work that is within the practitioner's competence should be undertaken.

Parsons (2004) suggests that the responsibility to be competent has three elements:

- Ensure you have the skills necessary to do the work assigned to you.
- Keep your knowledge, skills and expertise up to date.
- Ensure you do not give employers or clients the impression you can guarantee specific results.

This last point is an important one and raises an associated issue, namely 'overpromising', which seems endemic in the public relations community. It is done for two main reasons, both of which are unacceptable. First, practitioners themselves have an unrealistic view of what can be achieved and, second, they will 'do what it takes' to obtain or retain the business.

Conflicts of interest

The UK CIPR Code of Conduct states that conflicts of interest (or circumstances that may give rise to them) must be declared in writing to clients, potential clients and employers as soon as they arise. It is then up to the client or employer to decide whether they consent to their work being continued. Usually conflicts of interest are easy to identify, for example, representing two supermarket chains is a case in point. However, situations are dynamic and something that did not originally create a conflict can develop

into one. For example, a consultancy may represent a supermarket chain and an optician chain. No conflict there – until the supermarket decides to open an in-store optician service. The consultancy should declare their interest to both clients and may even decide to take the initiative and resign one of the accounts. Mergers and acquisitions can sometimes present similar challenges as the environment and circumstances for the organisation(s) change (see also Chapter 24).

Even if the clients decide that the consultancy can represent both organisations, there are operational difficulties: will unintended favouritism develop? What about confidentiality? The CIPR code states "insider" information must not be disclosed'. What if this information is to the major benefit or disadvantage of the other client?

Conflicts of interest can also occur when individual interests clash with client interests. It could be very difficult for a consultancy employee to represent a tobacco company if a relative has a smoking-related disease. Many consultancies have 'conscience clauses' that allow employees to opt out of undertaking work that poses a conflict of interest or a particular moral dilemma.

'Whistleblowing'

Public relations people often know the most intimate details about organisations, warts and all. What happens if a practitioner discovers serious misconduct? For example, they may become aware that the company accountant is tipping off investment analysts that the company is about to be taken over. They have a responsibility to do something in the public interest. In the UK there is a charity called Public Concern at Work (www.pcaaw.co.uk), which will provide advice to anyone who believes they have unearthed unethical practice and is unsure how to proceed. In some countries, the law also provides some protection so that employees

are not victimised for safeguarding the public interest.

Definition: A *whistleblower* is someone who goes outside the normal reporting procedures to alert internal senior managers or external sources of wrongdoing in the organisation

The media

Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) and Parsons (2004) point out the manifold ethical pitfalls of dealing with the media. The relationship is an important one because it is the core of much public relations activity and because of the peculiar nature of the mutual dependencies that develop.

Accuracy and honesty should be an aspiration of both journalism and public relations professions and there are issues that need to be confronted. When does cultivating journalists and providing them with hospitality and gifts turn effectively into bribery? What obligation does the free use of an expensive car put on a motoring journalist? What if some companies do not provide these things? Are they 'disadvantaged'?

Linked to truth telling is the issue of misleading by omission. It is perfectly possible to tell a partial story knowing that by omitting some key information the media (or any other receiver) will make assumptions that might be false. If a practitioner has clearly sought to mislead, this would be unethical. (See also discussion of truth telling in Chapter 14.)

Questions also arise over whether the whole truth should be told. Full disclosure is usually a good rule of thumb, but it is not always the right thing to do. Individuals need protecting in certain circumstances as the Kelly case (Mini case study 15.1) illustrates and it is debatable whether the revelation of his name was genuinely in the public interest.



PICTURE 15.2 Corporate bullying can put an individual under pressure and cause ethical dilemmas. (Source: © William Gottleib/Corbis.)

Parsons (2004) suggests that four pillars support ethical media relations:

- honesty and accuracy
- judiciousness (e.g. knowing when and how to use the media)
- responsiveness
- respect.

(See Think about 15.4.)

Ethical decision-making models and their application

The next obvious question then is: how can practitioners make ethical decisions that are soundly based and which stand up to scrutiny?

We will now look at three aspects of the decision-making process: the individual, external guides and the decision-making process itself.

mini case study 15.1

Truth telling in practice

What does telling the truth entail? In 2003, the UK government Ministry of Defence communicators told the truth when confirming Dr David Kelly was the source for the BBC reporter, Andrew Gilligan. Gilligan had claimed, in a live radio broadcast, that according to his source the government had knowingly included false or 'sexed up' information about weapons of mass destruction in its dossier of evidence for going to war in Iraq. The consequences of being correctly named as the source were devastating for

Dr Kelly personally – who committed suicide – and arguably for world affairs, which were significantly impacted by the events. While the subsequent Hutton Inquiry blamed the BBC more than the government for this series of events, there are still arguments about the truth of Gilligan's original report. However, this case shows that telling the truth can sometimes have devastating results. Truth on its own is not enough. Confidentiality, duty of care and judgement all need to come into the equation.

think about 15.4 Ethical issues in public relations

Give three more examples of ethical issues in public relations.

Feedback Examples of other ethical issues include:

- personal relationships with suppliers, journalists, senior managers, etc.
- offering preferential treatment to certain media outlets, e.g. exclusives on a regular basis
- hospitality to key opinion formers
- payment to journalists for work, e.g. writing for customer magazine
- respecting intellectual property of suppliers/potential suppliers, e.g. of consultants pitching for business
- use of 'off-the-record' briefings to gag or exploit media contacts.

The individual

Ethical reasoning begins at home, with each individual. American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) said that people go through three levels of moral development, each comprising two stages:

Level 1:

Stage 1: obey rules and avoid punishment

Stage 2: serve own needs, make fair deals

Level 2:

Stage 3: be loyal/good to others and positively conform to rules

Stage 4: do one's duty to society

Level 3:

Stage 5: uphold basic rights, values and contract of society

Stage 6: follow universal ethical principles

Kohlberg asserts that as children we do things to avoid punishment and seek to satisfy our own needs. For example, a child learns that if they behave as their parents want them to, they will escape punishment and get more of what they want. As we get older and more mature we are able to consider other people and act in self-restricting or even self-sacrificing ways because we believe that is the right thing to do. Of course, not everyone reaches that stage of development (some never get beyond level 1).

Whether or not you agree with Kohlberg, there are some important things here including an appreciation of yourself, a respect for others, a belief that you have certain obligations and duties and a value system that provides you with some guiding principles. This may be provided by a religious or philosophical code or by a self-constructed code of belief. In recent research, it was discovered that senior public relations practitioners had a strong personal belief system that carried

over into the way they behaved at work (Gregory 2002).

External guides

Having a personal set of values is a good starting point, but it is useful to have them validated by external and more objective sources.

The starting point is the law. Legally binding regulatory codes (in your country or society) such as the criminal law, rights legislation or financial regulations describe what is regarded as acceptable or ethical behaviour in society at large. However, the law has its limitations. What is legally acceptable is not always socially acceptable. CSR programmes usually go beyond what is required in law because minimum workers' rights or minimum environmental standards are not seen as being in the spirit of CSR which seeks not only to do no harm, but to make a positive contribution to society (see also Chapters 6 and 18).

Another external reference point is company and/or industry codes of practices. In the confectionery industry, many companies are now ensuring that their advertising is not targeted at younger children because of the issue of obesity. Cadbury Schweppes is one such company with a strict code of practice on this – see marketing codes of conduct at www.cadburyschweppes.com. Most companies have internal codes of conduct that cover things like conflicts of interest, the acceptance of gifts or what to do in cases of harassment, such as that operating at Coca-Cola, for example (see www.coca-cola.com/ourcompany/business_conduct.html).

Then there are the professional and business codes of conduct. The UK CIPR's Code of Conduct has already been mentioned, but it is useful to look at other professional codes for guidance. Useful sources of information are the Institute of Directors (www.IoD.org), Business in the Community (www.bitc.org.uk),

the Institute of Business Ethics (www.ibe.org.uk) and the Global Reporting Initiative (www.globalreporting.org), which offers sound advice on how to put together CSR reports. The Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management (www.globalpr.org) offers advice on global public relations ethics and how to practise in a wide range of countries.

Ethical decision-making models

Parsons (2004: 21) provides five ‘pillars’ that she claims ‘carry the weight of ethical decision-making in public relations’:

- veracity (tell the truth)
- non-maleficence (do no harm)
- beneficence (do good)
- confidentiality (respect privacy)
- fairness (to be fair and socially responsible).

Using these pillars in the form of questions can help you recognise if there is an ethical issue (Parsons 2004: 142):

- Is there harm involved?
- Is there a missed opportunity to do something good?
- Could anyone be misled in any way?
- Will anyone’s privacy be invaded?
- Is it unfair to assume?
- Does it feel wrong?

There are several ethical decision-making frameworks that can be used and a number are particularly applicable to public relations. One of the more well known is that devised by Ralph Potter of Harvard Divinity School and known as the Potter box (see Figure 15.3).

Potter defined four steps in ethical decision making:

- 1 *Define situation*: get all the relevant facts. What led to the situation? What is it now? Who is involved? Are there different views? What is the context?
- 2 *Identify values*: what personal values apply here? (Remember Josephson’s universal values.) What values can you draw from professional codes of practice? Are there legal guidelines?
- 3 *Select principles*: choose the decision-making framework that you and/or your company espouses, for example the virtue ethics approach.
- 4 *Choose loyalties*: prioritise all the stakeholders who demand your loyalty. Different situations will

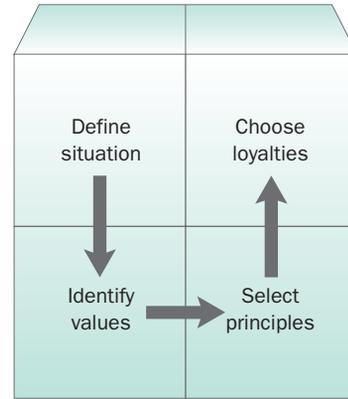


FIGURE 15.3 The Potter box (source: from *Public Relation Ethics*, 1st edition by Seib. © 1995. Reprinted with permission of Wadsworth, a division of Thomson Learning: www.thomsonrights.com. Fax 800 730 2215)

force you to choose your highest loyalty. For example, if your employer is doing something illegal, your loyalty to society must come first. If your company is being unjustly attacked, your loyalty to the company will come to the fore (see Mini case study 15.2).

Sims (1992) offers an equally useful model, which involves seven steps. He devised it specifically to help working practitioners who were faced with ethical dilemmas:

- 1 Recognise and clarify the dilemma.
- 2 Get all the possible facts, list *all* your options.
- 3 Test each option by asking is it legal? Is it right? Is it beneficial?
- 4 Make your decision.
- 5 Double-check your decision by asking: how would I feel if my family found out about this?
- 6 How would I feel if my decision was printed in the local newspaper?
- 7 Take action.

These models are, of course, only models, but they do show a pattern of thinking that can be useful to practitioners. They do not state which values or stakeholders should have priority – that is up to the practitioner to decide – but they do offer a useful framework to ensure that decision making is logical, rigorous, defensible and transparent, and that is critically important. They also help consistency of decision making, which helps build trust and credibility. (See mini case study 15.3 and Activity 15.2 on p. 304.)

mini case study 15.2

A financial services company

Financial Services plc has been downsizing because the increasingly competitive nature of the industry requires it to cut costs. It has been in discussions about a merger with Money Investment plc, which is in difficulties. Although rumours are rife, negotiations have not been completed. You are asked to issue a press release to respond to rumours, but senior management ask you to play things down and say discussions are at a very early stage. You know that discussions are well advanced and the company will make a formal announcement early next month. What do you do?

Using Potter's box, you first analyse the situation. You have been asked to put out misleading information on matters that are very important to some key stakeholders. When this is discovered you will be regarded as unethical and your reputation will be damaged. There may even be legal implications.

Second, you identify the values that are important; honesty and integrity may feature.

Third, you select the relevant ethical principles. What about Stock Exchange (legal) rules? Are there any issues with the financial services regulators? What about industry and company codes of conduct? What about the national public relations institute (e.g. in the UK the CIPR Code)? What about your personal ethics – don't lie, be loyal to your employer, do to others what you would want others to do to you?

Fourth, prioritise your stakeholders, who may include: Stock Exchange, regulators, shareholders, employees, customers, financial media, self, the industry.

This will be an uncomfortable business since it will force you to confront tough decisions about values and publics, but your decision (whatever it is), will be better and more consistent for it and you will have gone through a demonstrably rigorous process.

mini case study 15.3

Global Alliance Protocol

The Global Alliance Ethics Protocol is given in Appendix 2. Here is an example from its website of its decision-making framework in action.

Scenario: Your consultancy represents the National Cement and Asphalt Contractors Association (NCACA) in Italy. You have been asked to organise the Livorno Citizens for Active Road Expansion (LCARE), sponsored by the Association.

You have been asked by the media about LCARE.

What do you tell them?

- 1 *Define specific ethical issues:*
Is it ethical to omit sponsor information?
Is it ethical to disseminate false information regarding LCARE?
- 2 *Identify internal/external factors that may influence the decision-making process:*
Do local state or federal laws play a role?
What are my consultancy's values policies or procedures?
What action do I believe is in the public's best interest?
- 3 *Identify key values:*
Honesty
Fairness
Independence
- 4 *Identify affected parties:*
Livorno citizens
Voters
Government officials
Media
Public relations professions
Colleagues/employees/self
- 5 *Select ethical principles:*
Disclosure of information
Open communication fosters informed decision making in democratic society
- 6 *Make a decision:*
Responsible advocacy requires that those affected be given due consideration
Appropriate action dictates a truthful response to the media disclosing your client as the sponsor of LCARE

Source: www.globalpr.org

activity 15.2**Public relations ethics**

- 1 Draw up your own personal ethical code.
 - 2 Do you think public relations consultants should not represent any legally constituted organisation? List your reasons. Are there any organisations you would not work for? Why?
 - 3 Look at the ethical decision-making models in McElreath (1997) and Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995). Which one do you think is most appropriate for public relations practitioners? Why?
 - 4 What are the key differences between 'putting a good, but fair gloss' on something and unacceptable 'spinning'?
 - 5 If the press asked you to name an individual employee who was suspected of sexual harassment of young employees, how would you handle it? Articulate your decision-making process.
- Decision-making models. Reasons why one model may be chosen over another might include: ease of use under pressure, simple to explain to others, aligns with my own moral stance, is similar to company code of ethics.
 - Key differences between a 'good gloss' and 'spinning'. The key issue is the intention to deceive. A good gloss should provide recipients of the information with a fair and truthful representation of a company, even if it is a positive representation. If other information is obtained, the recipient of the 'good gloss' should still recognise the representation as reflecting the facts. 'Spinning' implies that people will not receive a fair representation. Either the omissions of fact may be so great as to allow the recipients to draw false conclusions (and the information originator is aware of this), or misleading information may be included or implied.

Feedback

- For guidance on personal ethics codes, see Parsons 2004.

Summary

This chapter has sought to provide some of the reasons why ethics in public relations is important and why it is complex and challenging. However, just because something is difficult doesn't mean it should not be done. Reflecting deeply about your own personal values is hard. Reconciling all the conflicting demands on your loyalties is hard. Understanding all the various philosophical and theoretical frameworks that are designed to help you in the process is not easy. Despite all this, it is worth every bit of effort.

Being viewed by your peers and the people that you interact with as a person of judgement and integrity is a

mark not only of your professionalism, but also of your personal character. People of integrity are most highly regarded; it is one of the keys to having a good reputation. For an individual of reputation to be in charge of an organisation's most precious asset, the relationships on which its own reputation is founded, is good news indeed. Furthermore, for people of high reputation to be involved in the profession of public relations can only mean that, over time, the standing of the whole industry will improve.

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For glossary definitions relevant to this chapter, visit the **selected glossary** feature on the website at: www.pearsoned.co.uk/tench

Appendix 1: Chartered Institute of Public Relations Code of Conduct

CIPR Principles

1. Members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations agree to:
 - i. Maintain the highest standards of professional endeavour, integrity, confidentiality, financial propriety and personal conduct;
 - ii. Deal honestly and fairly in business with employers, employees, clients, fellow professionals, other professions and the public;
 - iii. Respect the customs, practices and codes of clients, employers, colleagues, fellow professionals and other professions in all countries where they practise;
 - iv. Take all reasonable care to ensure employment best practice including giving no cause for complaint of unfair discrimination on any grounds;
 - v. Work within the legal and regulatory frameworks affecting the practice of public relations in all countries where they practise;
 - vi. Encourage professional training and development among members of the profession;
 - vii. Respect and abide by this Code and related Notes of Guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and encourage others to do the same.

Principles of Good Practice

2. Fundamental to good public relations practice are:

Integrity

- Honest and responsible regard for the public interest;
- Checking the reliability and accuracy of information before dissemination;
- Never knowingly misleading clients, employers, employees, colleagues and fellow professionals about the nature of representation or what can be competently delivered and achieved;
- Supporting the CIPR Principles by bringing to the attention of the CIPR examples of malpractice and unprofessional conduct.

Competence

- Being aware of the limitations of professional competence: without limiting realistic scope for development, being willing to accept or delegate only that work for which practitioners are suitably skilled and experienced;
- Where appropriate, collaborating on projects to ensure the necessary skill base.

Transparency and conflicts of interest

- Disclosing to employers, clients or potential clients any financial interest in a supplier being recommended or engaged;
- Declaring conflicts of interest (or circumstances which may give rise to them) in writing to clients, potential clients and employers as soon as they arise;
- Ensuring that services provided are costed and accounted for in a manner that conforms to accepted business practice and ethics.

Confidentiality

- Safeguarding the confidences of present and former clients and employers;
- Being careful to avoid using confidential and 'insider' information to the disadvantage or prejudice of clients and employers, or to self-advantage of any kind;
- Not disclosing confidential information unless specific permission has been granted or the public interest is at stake or if required by law.

Maintaining Professional Standards

3. CIPR members are encouraged to spread awareness and pride in the public relations profession where practicable by, for example:
 - Identifying and closing professional skills gaps through the Institute's Continuous Professional Development programme;
 - Offering work experience to students interested in pursuing a career in public relations;
 - Participating in the work of the Institute through the committee structure, special interest and vocational groups, training and networking events;
 - Encouraging employees and colleagues to join and support the CIPR;
 - Displaying the CIPR designatory letters on business stationery;
 - Specifying a preference for CIPR applicants for staff positions advertised;
 - Evaluating the practice of public relations through use of the CIPR Research & Evaluation Toolkit and other quality management and quality assurance systems (e.g. ISO standards); and constantly striving to improve the quality of business performance;
 - Sharing information on good practice with members and, equally, referring perceived examples of poor practice to the Institute.

Appendix 2: Global Alliance Ethics Protocol

Declaration of Principles

A profession is distinguished by certain characteristics or attributes, including:

- Mastery of a particular intellectual skill through education and training
- Acceptance of duties to a broader society than merely one's clients/employers
- Objectivity
- High standards of conduct and performance

We base our professional principles therefore on the fundamental value and dignity of the individual. We believe in and support the free exercise of human rights, especially freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the media, which are essential to the practice of good public relations.

In serving the interest of clients and employers, we dedicate ourselves to the goals of better communication, understanding, and cooperation among diverse individuals, groups, and institutions of society. We also subscribe to and support equal opportunity of employment in the public relations profession and lifelong professional development.

We pledge:

- To conduct ourselves professionally, with integrity, truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility to our clients, our client publics, and to an informed society;
- To improve our individual competence and advance the knowledge and proficiency of the profession through continuing education and research and where available, through the pursuit of professional accreditation;
- To adhere to the principles of the Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations.

Protocol Standards

We believe it is the duty of every association and every member within that association that is party to the Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations to:

- Acknowledge that there is an obligation to protect and enhance the profession.
- Keep informed and educated about practices in the profession that ensure ethical conduct.
- Actively pursue personal professional development.
- Accurately define what public relations activities can and cannot accomplish.
- Counsel its individual members in proper ethical decision-making generally and on a case specific basis.

- Require that individual members observe the ethical recommendations and behavioural requirements of the Protocol.

We are committed to ethical practices, preservation of public trust, and the pursuit of communication excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism, and ethical conduct.

Advocacy

We will serve our client and employer interests by acting as responsible advocates and by providing a voice in the market place of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

Honesty

We will adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of clients and employers.

Integrity

We will conduct our business with integrity and observe the principles and spirit of the Code in such a way that our own personal reputation and that of our employer and the public relations profession in general is protected.

Expertise

We will encourage members to acquire and responsibly use specialised knowledge and experience to build understanding and client/employer credibility. Furthermore we will actively promote and advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education.

Loyalty

We will insist that members are faithful to those they represent, while honouring their obligations to serve the interests of society and support the right of free expression.

Advancing the Protocol

We believe it is the responsibility of each member association to draw upon its own members' experiences to expand the number of examples of good and bad practice so as to better inform members' ethical practices. Experiences should be broadly shared with other members within the association and with the Global Alliance so as to build up case histories that may assist in individual cases throughout the world.