

Professional Code of Ethics Analysis

The codes of conduct examined in this paper are those of the IEEE Computer Society, the IEEE Code of Ethics, and the British Computer Society.

I. Similarities Between the BCS, the IEEE, and the IEEE Computer Society Codes of Ethics

All three of these codes of ethics include provisions for public interest and expectations for professional member interaction with the public.

A. The Professional Conduct Provisions

All three organizations emphasize that members should uphold the integrity and reputation of their profession by maintaining high standards of conduct. The articles of the IEEE Code of Ethics emphasize the importance of quality work and integrity, requiring members to “avoid unlawful conduct in professional activities, offer honest criticism of technical work, acknowledge and correct errors, be honest and realistic in stating claims or estimates based on available data, and credit properly the contributions of others. . . maintain and improve our technical competence and undertake technological tasks only if qualified, or after full disclosure of pertinent limitations” (IEEE). These articles highlight the significance of quality work and integrity within the IEEE membership.

Similarly, the BCS requires that its members “only undertake work or provide services within their professional competence, and to continually develop their professional knowledge, skills, and competence” (BCS) while adhering to legal and compliance requirements. Likewise, the IEEE Computer Society emphasizes the duty to “advance the integrity and reputation of the profession consistent with the public interest” (IEEE Computer Society), alongside compliance with laws and regulations.

All three organizations stress that members should serve as exemplary representatives of their profession, continuously enhancing their skills and adhering to professional standards. Members are expected to conduct themselves honestly and transparently in interactions with clients, colleagues, and the public while complying with legal obligations. Additionally, all three organizations emphasize accountability among members for upholding professional and ethical standards. The three codes make clear that ethical practice in computing requires both technical responsibility and respect for the public. Good computing practice depends not only on competence, but also on care for the people affected by the work. Ultimately, the three organizations present ethics as a standard that protects both the profession and the people it serves.

B. The Public Interest Provisions

The BCS's code of conduct expects its members to "have due regard for public health, privacy, security, and the wellbeing of others and the environment, conduct professional activities without discrimination, promote equal access to the benefits of IT, and seek to promote the inclusion of all sectors in society" (BCS). Similarly, the IEEE also requires its members to adhere to comparable standards. Members are expected to "hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public, protect the privacy of others, and disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment." The code also prohibits members from engaging in harassment, discrimination, or any other actions that could cause harm to others.

The public interest provisions of all three codes of ethics emphasize that members steer clear of criminal activity, or any conduct that could cause harm to members of the public or the environment. Another interesting thing to note is that the three organizations stress the importance of respecting the privacy and well-being of others.

II. Differences Between the BCS, the IEEE, and the IEEE Computer Society Codes of Ethics

The codes of ethics of these three IT and engineering organizations share more similarities than differences. One notable distinction is the level of detail provided in each. The IEEE Computer Society Code of Ethics is the most comprehensive, specifying clear expectations for its members. In contrast, the IEEE Code of Ethics and the BCS Computer Society codes are broader, with the IEEE Code of Ethics providing the least detail of the three.

Another key difference is the presence, or absence, of an amendment process in each organization's code of ethics.. The IEEE code outlines a procedure for proposing changes, requiring publication of proposals at least three months before final consideration by the board of directors. All IEEE boards must review proposed changes before a final vote, which requires a two-thirds majority of present directors. In contrast, amendment procedures are absent from the IEEE Computer Society Code of Ethics and the BCS code.

Furthermore, the BCS and IEEE Code of Ethics apply to a broader range of IT and engineering professionals, while the IEEE Computer Society Code specifically applies to software engineers, educators, and students in software engineering. One more notable difference is that the BCS requires its members to report any breaches of the code by other members, with explicit mention of disciplinary action for breaches. No such obligations or disciplinary action are mentioned in the IEEE Computer Society or IEEE codes.

III. Which of the Three Codes of Ethics is the Most Complete?

The British Computer Society's (BCS) code of ethics indeed stands out as the most complete code of ethics of the three analyzed, due to its clear provision, indicating that there are consequences for breaching the code. The explicit mention of disciplinary action adds significant weight to the BCS's ethical framework and in my opinion, contributes to its effectiveness in guiding members' behavior. By holding members to the obligation of reporting any breaches, and specifying disciplinary actions, the BCS creates a culture of accountability. These provisions not only protect the reputation of the organization but also foster a sense of responsibility among members. In contrast, the absence of similar provisions in the IEEE Code of Ethics and the IEEE Computer Society Code leaves room for vagueness regarding the consequences of breaking the code of ethics. While these codes outline expected behaviors and principles, the lack of specific consequences may weaken their effectiveness in deterring unethical conduct.

IV. Why Codes of Ethics are Important and How They Benefit Organizations

A. Why are Codes of Ethics Important?

At the core of ethics lies social responsibility—the obligations humans owe to behave and live in a manner that benefits the society they live in. According to an article by Santa Clara University, “We can think of ethics as the principles that guide our behavior toward making the best choices that contribute to the common good of all There is a framework of ethics underlying our lives on a daily basis, helping us make decisions that create positive impacts and steering us away from unjust outcomes” (Ethics in Life and Business, 2019). In other words, Ethics can be said to be important because it helps promote justice and equity in society.

In business, codes of ethics are important for two major reasons: to protect the vulnerable and less powerful, while preventing the abuse of power, and to protect organizations, their stakeholders, and professionals. According to Susan Liataud, for Susan Liataud & Associates, “Ethics is an ongoing determination of moral principles guiding conduct, taking into account all relevant information, values, and current and future impact on all stakeholders” (n.d.). She further expands on this definition by emphasizing how ethics affects business strategy, business operations, external relations, governance, and human resources (n.d.). Organizations need to exercise caution and apply ethical consideration in deciding how they do business, who they do business with, and how they engage with business partners, employees, and even other organizations.

B. How do Codes of Ethics Benefit Organizations?

The most important role that codes of ethics play for organizations is the reputation they help a business build. Every benefit that comes with having a code of ethics falls under the umbrella of this role as a strong code of ethics guides an organization's decision-making. An organization's reputation affects everything: who wants to do business with them, how they're perceived by other organizations, and even how governments view them. Therefore, the decision-making process of an organization as influenced by its code of ethics, can be a strong determinant when it comes to the success of a business.

The first way a code of ethics helps a company's reputation is by earning the organization trust with its stakeholders. When organizations have a decision-making process that is guided by solid ethical principles, such as honesty and transparency, for example, they can gain trust and loyalty from their stakeholders. In a Business Studies Journal Article, Alexander Joseph explains, "One of the key principles of business ethics is honesty When businesses are honest with their customers, employees, and other stakeholders, they build trust and credibility, which can lead to increased loyalty and long-term success" (Joseph, 2023). A good example of this is the topic of privacy policies and how companies handle customer data. Many people would prefer to be informed about the complete truth of how their data will be used by organizations before choosing to engage with the business. Honest and transparent organizations have an easier time gaining the trust of their stakeholders. Consequently, when stakeholders trust an organization, organizations have a better chance of flourishing and being respected.

Secondly, codes of ethics are beneficial for organizations because they help organizations attract and retain high-quality talent. Most employees have some form of a moral compass that guides their decision-making and are likely to align themselves with organizations that operate on a similar moral compass. For example, environmental consciousness has been a huge theme in the past decade, and people who champion this movement are less likely to consider employment with organizations that are not environmentally conscious. Red Flag Reporting reports that, "Research confirms that a workplace's culture, values, and ethics are top priorities for job seekers. This is especially true for Millennials and members of Gen Z, who will collectively make up the majority of the workforce by 2025" (Ethical Workplaces, 2023). Moreso, a study by Blue Beyond Consulting reveals that 80% of the labor force in the US and Canada under the age of 45 believe that employers have "an obligation to be a force for good in society" (2023). These findings show that more and more employees hold their employers to some form of ethical standards. Thus, a company's ethical practices can influence employee's

decisions when choosing where to work or whether to remain in an organization. It is indeed not rocket science that high-quality employees are a part of the foundation of an organization's success.

Codes of ethics are beneficial for organizations because they help organizations mitigate risk. Liautaud contends that "No risk management process is complete without an overarching ethics analysis, together with one that addresses the ethical implications of every specific risk category" (Liautaud, n.d.). Both legal and ethical expectations of members of an organization need to be specified in an organization's code of conduct. For example, organizational policies on bribery need to be specified in every business's code of conduct. Having a clause that prohibits both internal and external bribery, as well as disciplinary procedures for breaches can help businesses avoid future scandals or legal consequences. Consistent implementation of an organization's code of ethics can promote accountability and help an organization mitigate risks on so many levels.

V. Which Code of Ethics Best Suits My Career Path?

My end goal in my career path is to become a legal engineer, thus, I believe The American Society of Legal Engineers (ASLE) Model Code of Ethics would be the best fit for me. This code of ethics prioritizes privacy, justice and fairness, honesty and transparency, and accountability—all pillars I intend to uphold in my professional life (ASLE Code of Ethics, n.d.) Considering the sensitive nature of legal data and information, fierce prioritization of consumer privacy is essential. Moreso, justice and fairness are critical aspects of legal engineering, both on the technical and legal end, especially to prevent unfair and unnecessary bias. Finally, honesty, transparency, and accountability are fundamental in all aspects of both the legal and IT industries as they foster trust and integrity.

An example of an ethical issue that may arise in my profession as a legal engineer is privacy concerns. A legal engineer, depending on their area of expertise, has to be careful about revealing sensitive or confidential data or information without consent. In addition, legal engineers who specialize in regulation and compliance have a duty to advise the organizations they work for on the proper use of consumer data. Here, the ASLE Model Code of Ethics comes to provide clear guidance on how to address ethical concerns related to privacy.

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