

Breach of Ethics

Professional ethics has been described as principles that govern the behaviour of a person or group in a business environment. Professional ethics are founded on rules on how a person should act towards other people and institutions in such an environment. Professions define or determine how members are expected to behave. It is for this reason that disciplinary codes are established and enforced. The individual practitioner or employee is held accountable in meeting and/or observing the standards set. Where an individual falls short, it is the expectation that he/she would be subject to being disciplined by the professional body or organization for failing to follow the established practice(s).

Beside professional ethics, reference is also made to what is known as organizational ethics. The latter is described as a code of ethics that apply within an organization. These are a set of principles which are used to guide the organization in its decisions, programmes, and policies. The organization's culture expects that leaders, management and employees will adhere to a code of ethics. The bottom-line is that in the application of both professional or organization ethics, the behaviour of all persons will be guided by the established standards. The need for adhering to ethical standards is of great importance to professions and organizations. They both have a vested interest in protecting image and reputation. Where these are tarnished could lead to a loss of confidence in them by the public they served.

Individuals often subsume themselves into organization. It therefore means that there must be an understanding of the difference between individualistic and communal application of ethics. Collective responsibility forms part of the communal environment in which an individual operates. This means that individual beliefs and practices may become secondary, if the intention is to be a part of the organization and group. This means the acceptance of standards, practices, procedures and processes. Where the individual fundamentally deviates from these, it basically means that he/she has lost the plot. By disregarding the principles is an indication of one's disrespect.

It would be flawed to put forward the view that an individual is not entitled to express a contrary opinion. It can however be seen as a breach of confidentiality if the individual chooses to publicly disclose details of an in camera or close door meeting, without first serving notice of the intention to do so. Where it reaches the point that the individual has a fundamental divide on what is taking place within the organization and/or group, it is

for the individual to use whatever means with the rules and procedures set out by the organization to protest or to canvass support for the views shared.

If it reaches the point where the divide is strong, then the individual has the right to exercise the option of removing him/herself by way of resignation, withdrawal of membership, and/or commence a campaign lobbying for change. Much could be achieved by persons who feel aggrieved if they follow the rules and moreover, use diplomacy as part of their strategy.

It is unethical for persons who are part of a group or organization to publicly criticize or mount campaigns against the said organization; particularly where the individual is a part of the decision making process. Individuals who find themselves in this predicament must be aware that they stand to lose both respect and credibility. With this being the case, it is important for an individual to live with his/her conscience. Each individual is known to subscribe to personal ethics. With this being the case, it is questionable whether it is right to vilify, condemn and sully the name of an individual, who takes a bold stance on anything that is deemed to be wrong, or an injustice which is being meted out.