

What it means to be a professional

Learning ethics and aspects of Professional Practice

Outline and background of case study

A mature age student has recently graduated. He had a trade background prior to obtaining his degree and with previous experience taken into account he received RPL for the first semester in the CM degree.

As a consequence of this he missed out on the typical course/ unit that runs through the advantages of joining a professional body. In his working day with a SME QS practice he has to attend site for interim valuations of the works and assessing variations on behalf of the major consultants.

His most recent project is a multi-million-dollar complex for the NSW State Government refurbishing a child care centre. He visits the site monthly. On a particular occasion an earthworks contractor approaches him and asks if at the same time he undertakes the progress report for the client he would also measure and estimate the work that the earthworks operatives have carried out. The earthworks contractor indicates that he would be prepared to pay for the service – cash in an envelope.

The QS considers the proposition... he wonders if it would make a difference to his employer? He could do with a bit of extra cash as the rent he current pays on his city unit is about to increase.

Questions:

Ask students for their understanding of ethics in a broad context.

Is there a conflict of interest in the above scenario?

What personal values come into play in the above scenario?

Can you think of a company policy that would help the QS in the above scenario?

Purpose – aims and objectives

The purpose of setting out this example is to highlight an ethical dilemma that may arise in the day to day activities of a professional builder or QS/ consultant. Due to the nature of construction project delivery there are many situations when a newly graduated student will have to grapple with the ambiguous aspects of professional practice and ethics.

The aim is to help students understand that aligning professional practice with a Code of Conduct will put them in a good position to manage circumstances similar to those outlined. It would be beneficial for students to obtain a good grasp of a typical Code and be able to explain its proper use.

The objective is to familiarize students with several examples of Codes of Practice from the various accrediting bodies associated within built environment disciplines that will assist them in resolving the case study dilemma set out and other issues of a similar nature that may arise in the course of the discussion.

Antecedents (precursor)

In this circumstance antecedents may include for example; financial capability – the pressure of meeting personal bills described in the case study would likely put the student under stress; the unexpected nature of the offer from the earthworks contractor, compounded with little experience of such an event from the student's perspective may also serve to unsettle the student.

Protective factors

- Being able to recognize unknowns (the circumstances associated with the case study) would be a good protective factor; i.e. knowing when and who to ask.
- Peer support
- Knowledge that the graduate is working in a supportive and professional environment bound by the policy associated with professional practice would be a significant protective factor.
- In class it would be worthwhile to explain that whilst a circumstance of this nature is confronting, positive antecedents and use of the aforementioned protective factors should reduce the risk factors.

A bit of a foundation and understanding on those stresses would have been definitely useful... really how it works at the moment is trial and error...

Risk factors

- The balance between risk and protective factors is said to be a dynamic process. Accordingly, a lack of protective factors would increase the possibility of risk associated with a student's resilience when considering the case study.
- Insufficient competency or a lack of professional practice awareness may increase the possibility of risk associated with the case study. Discussion around this risk factor would help students develop resilience.
- Support - it may be noted that the builder and cadet contracts administrator may take the opportunity to prepare prior to the meeting. This would be regardless of the confrontation identified.

Resilience or coping

Remember, resilience is the ability to bounce back after adversity.

Some discussion around possible outcomes associated with the case study with a particular focus on the positive is useful. Confidence, and to some degree the expertise drawn from discussions of this nature have the ability to enhance resilience or coping.

A capability (utilising the expertise identified in the bullet point above) to defuse a situation of the kind identified is positive.

Providing solutions and a way forward, both immediately and in the short term are helpful.

Consequences

A particular consequence arising from the case study can be identified as personal growth. This draws us back to the definition of resilience shown above

Peter Davis, University of Newcastle