Code of Ethics in Practice: A Look at the World Bank Group

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Code of Ethics (COE): A Review
What is a Code of Ethics?

A general framework for individuals within a group?

A collection of ideals? (guidance)

A legally binding agreement? (policy)

A PR stunt?
“Codes of ethics are controversial documents. Some writers have suggested that codes of professional ethics are pointless and unnecessary. Many others believe that codes are useful and important, but disagree about why.”

- Source: Illinois Institute of Technology Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, http://ethics.iit.edu/index1.php/Programs/Codes%20of%20Ethics/Introduction
## Purposes of codes of ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Ladd</th>
<th>Heinz Luegenbiehl</th>
<th>Harris et al.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics are meant to be open-ended &amp; reflective</td>
<td>Codes of ethics have sociological value; acknowledges group obligation beyond self-interest</td>
<td>Professionals value their codes of ethics even if they do not regularly consult it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics should not be confused with laws</td>
<td>Codes of ethics create moral problems without resolving them</td>
<td>Codes of ethics are considerations, not hard rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals have no obligations separate from being a moral person</td>
<td>Codes of ethics conflict with moral autonomy</td>
<td>Individuals still retain autonomy and it’s this autonomy that allows them to jointly agree on a code of ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes of ethics are pointless and pernicious</td>
<td>Are rarely used in practice?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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## Purposes of codes of ethics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Michael Davis</th>
<th>Stephen Unger</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Codes of ethics are binding, conventions</em></td>
<td><em>Collective recognition of the group’s responsibilities</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Decrease the peer pressure to take advantage of other’s poor (e.g. corrupt) conduct</em></td>
<td><em>Establish norms for ethical behavior</em></td>
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<td><em>Controls competition &amp; encourages coordination</em></td>
<td><em>Creating &amp; revising a code of ethics develops focus, solidarity, &amp; discussion topics</em></td>
</tr>
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<td><em>A code of ethics is what defines a profession</em></td>
<td><em>Signal to the public that the group pursues, moral, responsible conduct</em></td>
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COE: A look at the World Bank Group (WBG)
"Corruption is the greatest obstacle... to reducing poverty. It distorts the rule of law, weakens a nation's institutional foundation, and severely affects the poor who are already the most disadvantaged members of our society... It is important to go beyond the symptoms of corruption to tackle it in a sustainable manner..."

Organizational Details

Founded 1945, emerged from the Bretton Woods agreements in 1944

Intergovernmental organization with 185 members

International financial institution that provides loans to developed & developing countries with goals of economic development and poverty reduction

World Bank Group – parent organization with 5 agencies
  World Bank – 2 agencies; loans to developing countries only with intent of poverty reduction
Structure of WBG COE

- Reference: World Bank Group COE.
Procedures for raising concerns

L – Learn the facts
E – Evaluate the issue
A – Act Appropriately
D – Develop a plan for follow-up

- Reference: World Bank Group COE.
## WBG: An Analysis of their COE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspirational</th>
<th>Enforceable (at least in part)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value diversity and inclusion in all decision making practices including career advancement, promotion, recruitment, compensation</td>
<td>Shall not engage in or accept harassment of any kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect and encourage a healthy work-life balance</td>
<td>Maintain accurate books and records and follow controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively contribute to the greater good</td>
<td>Disclose any personal business or financial interest that might relate to [one’s] WBG work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act with fairness, compassion, and impartiality</td>
<td>Fulfill my personal legal obligations</td>
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Their Code of Ethics in Practice

Unit: The Office of Ethics & Business Conduct (EBC)

Protection: Confidentiality, Retaliation, Whistleblowers

Enforcement & penalties

Info:
- Provides a 2 page pocket version of the code (English, Chinese, Japanese)
- Ethics Helpline (anonymous)
- N.B. Broken Website Links (Values, FAQ)
Discussion Questions

Whose view of the code of ethics is most convincing - Ladd’s, Luegenbiehl’s, Harris et al, or Davis?

Can a group of practitioners be “professionals” without a code of ethics?

What is the relationship between a mission statement, core values, and a code of ethics?

Are there different challenges to applying a code of ethics domestically vs. internationally?

How do you measure the impact & effectiveness of a code of ethics, especially since ethical advice is often confidential?

Do you remember the code of ethics for any job(s) that you have held? Was it ever mentioned or considered beyond employee orientation?