

Ethics and Leadership

All PMI credential holders and members agree to abide by the PMI Code of Ethics [download a copy from: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/PMICodeofEthics.pdf>], however, many fail to appreciate the importance of ethics to effective project management.

Creating and fostering a culture of integrity and ethical behaviour is critical to business success¹ and is equally important to project success². The most effective tool for achieving this is your behaviour. Behaviours are based on values, and the PMI Code of Ethics frames those values for our profession; but any written set of rules and guidelines can only provide the framework. If you plan to be a successful project leader, action is required!

As a project leader, it is your actions that set the ethical tone that the other members of the project team will follow. Your actions reflect your beliefs; your beliefs are based in your ethical framework; and your ethical framework is a factor of your moral reasoning.

Fortunately, there is a ladder of development in moral reasoning (determining how to apply the Code of Ethics in any situation). Prof. L. Kohlberg (Chicago and Harvard Universities) has identified six stages of moral development:

1. **Rules -v- punishment trade off:** there is a fixed, external set of rules and only one right answer to every moral dilemma³.
2. **What's in it for me?:** ethical behaviours are focused on self interest.
3. **Expectations of others:** behaviour is based on the expectations of others; eg, the boss, co-workers or family.
4. **The good of the group:** individuals at this level see the business or team as a whole. They obey rules, laws and respect authority so that the social order and business structures are maintained.
5. **What's best for society:** thinkers at this level seek to do what's best for all stakeholders. Leaders at this level understand and balance the interests of everyone in a principled way.
6. **Universal human ethics:** behaviour is predicated on actions and decisions that demonstrate a respect for all.

Growth from one level to the next is achieved when a moral dilemma is encountered which cannot be managed at your current level of reasoning; grappling with the dilemma to achieve a more comprehensive viewpoint is the path to growth. Most people find the help of mentors invaluable at these points in their career.

The PMI Code of Ethics works at all levels, breach the mandatory provisions and you can be expelled from the association (Level 1); whilst the aspirational sections of the Code provide inspiration and challenges to encourage Level 5 and 6 thinking and behaviours.

Which level is appropriate?

Employing ethical people is critical for project and business success. New, junior team members need to be operating at Level 3 as a minimum and should be expected to rise to Level 4 quite quickly.

Effective project leaders should aspire to operate at Level 5 in the hierarchy, focusing on the good of society, the business and stakeholders as a whole. Only exceptional business and national leaders achieve Level 6 but every leader should aspire to achieving this ultimate level of ethical behaviour.

¹ For more see *The Adversity Paradox*, J. Barry Griswell and Bob Jennings

² See WP1014 – Leadership, http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1014_Leadership.pdf

³ Problems can be solved, dilemmas are intractable.