

ETHICS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
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The issue of ethics for public relations professionals is as vital today and tomorrow as it was for the forefathers of IPRA (International Public Relations Association) in the 1950's.

“Ethics” is the general term for attempts to state or determine what is good, both for the individual and for the society as a whole. It is often termed the science of morality. “Business ethics” is the field of ethics that examines moral controversies relating to the social responsibilities of business practices, in any economic system. It looks at various business activities and asks “Is this ethically right or wrong”. Business ethics can be applied at three levels: the individual employee, the organization, and the society. Very often situations arise in which the three levels are not in line. Behaviour may be good for the employee, bad for the company, and good for society (or some other combination). Some ethicists ... see the role of business ethics as the harmonization and reconciliation of these three conflicting levels.

So a modern history of the ethics public relations begins from 50th years in the USA. Down the years, ethical and legal breaches of conduct led to the formation of the Public Relations Society of America (1948) and to the promulgation by that organization in 1950 of a Code of Professional Standards. Since these guidelines were introduced, more than 200 colleges and universities in the United States have begun offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in public relations in which the courses offered emphasize ethical issues. Nonetheless, enforcement has been lax, principally because of the difficulties involved in trying to prosecute breaches of conduct by individuals who work in an unlicensed profession in which freedom of speech and related Constitutional privileges are inherent in their right to practice. Enforcement has become so challenging and costly that the PRSA in 2000 completely revised its Code of more than 50 years. Now, the Code is framed as a self-directed teaching tool that expresses the “universal values that inspire ethical behavior and performance.” Other public relations membership organizations, such as the IPRA, and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), have continued to promulgate codes of conduct with specific examples of what they consider unprofessional and/or unethical behaviors. As these organizations grew in influence, many of the power groups within them, most notably agency owners and the nation's top corporate PR executives, felt the need for more specialized attention which led to the formation of several small but highly influential “splinter” groups that have had a marked impact on ethical as well as strategic thinking.

In reality, there probably will never be an effective mechanism for “policing” the practices of public relations professionals, but there will always be a need for documents and programs aimed at encouraging and assuring ethical standards of behavior among all practitioners, regardless of their particular institutional allegiance.

Today ethics rules play a very important role for a building of the public relations organizations's. If we consider a number of traditional public relations functions within organizations, we can begin to develop a framework for understanding how ethical PR practice can also play a role in the overall socially responsible functioning of organizations. Here are some examples of what PR can do. These are suggested places to start rather than any exhaustive list of tactics:

- *Internal relations*: a sound PR strategy in internal relations can have a number of significant impacts on the ethical organization.

- *Client/consumer relations*: ensuring that communication strategies and vehicles adhere to the organizational code and that clients/consumers recognize that the organization's behaviour is guided by such a code is PR's major role.

- *Community relations*: this is a natural fit for public relations, contributing to the organization's social responsibility requirements. Supporting employee volunteer efforts in the community is a way to enhance both community and employee relations.

- *Media relations*: making commitments to media contacts about the level of ethical behaviour that they can expect from organization might initially be met with scepticism, but eventually, when the promises are fulfilled over time, the relationship will be enhanced and the organization's responsibility to be truthful and transparent will be fulfilled.

Other areas of public relations such as investor relations and government relations (public affairs) are also opportunities for PR professionals to behave in an ethical manner and to contribute to their organization's social responsibility programme.

Corporate Social Responsibility is not a philanthropic project to make corporations look good. It should be seen as part of a business strategy. It is an idea concerned with how corporations can behave ethically and pursue industrial processes that have a positive impact on society. It advocates transparency, accountability, integrity, and responsibility in the governance of corporations. Corporations fall into three groups in their approach to social responsibility:

1. irresponsible corporations - those who do not care much about either societal goals or their own social image;

2. compliant corporations - those who obey laws but nothing more;

3. pro-active corporations - those who provide leadership, realizing the competitive power of ethical behavior and the importance for their business of a good social image.

At the modern time exists some international codes of ethics public relations.

Before it is the international codes of ethics public relations, that was adopted in Venice, in May of 1961. This document tells about such points as:

1. Personal and Professional Integrity. It is understood that by personal integrity is meant the maintenance of both high moral standards and a sound reputation. By professional integrity is meant observance of the Constitution rules and, particularly, the Code as adopted by IPRA.

2. Conduct towards Clients and Employers. A member has a general duty of fair dealing towards his/her clients or employers, past and present. A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those concerned. A member shall safeguard the confidences of either present and former clients or employers. A member shall not employ methods tending to be derogatory of another member's client or employer.

3. Conduct towards the Public and the Media. A member shall conduct his/her professional activities with respect to the public interest and for the dignity of the individual. A member shall not engage in practice which tends to corrupt the integrity of channels of public communication. A member shall not intentionally disseminate false or misleading information. A member shall at all times seek to give a faithful representation of the organisation which he/she serves.

4. Conduct towards Colleagues. A member shall not intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice of another member. A member shall not seek to supplant another member with his employer or client. A member shall co-operate with fellow members in upholding and enforcing this Code.

Public relations in a transitional society is very much a means of development, and therefore, it is important that public relations practitioners be familiar with ethics and quality standards and that these be implemented in public relations at the management level of both business and politics.