Ethics comparison companion

ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE | MODULE 2 | PARTS A AND B

Professional judgement

Ethics asks what should be done and why. A professional must consider the people who rely on the work, the public interest and the reasons supporting a decision.

Starting point	Why further ethical reasoning is needed
Law	Legal compliance matters, but it does not settle every question about responsible conduct.
Feelings or beliefs	They can alert us to a concern. Personal conviction alone does not supply consistent, publicly defensible reasons.
Accepted behaviour	A common workplace practice can still harm people or conflict with professional responsibilities.
Business and profession	Business ethics concerns business conduct. Professional ethics adds the obligations and expectations attached to a profession.

Five fundamental principles

Principle	Practical focus
Integrity	Be straightforward and honest.
Objectivity	Do not let bias, conflicts or undue influence distort judgement.
Competence and due care	Keep knowledge current and perform work diligently and competently.
Confidentiality	Protect information; consider applicable disclosure rights and duties.
Professional behaviour	Meet professional and legal obligations and protect the profession's credibility.

Four tensions between competing values

Tension	The competing consideration
Truth / loyalty	Honest communication / commitment to a person or organisation
Individual / group	One person's interests / the interests of a wider group
Short term / long term	Immediate benefits or pressures / future effects
Justice / mercy	Consistent accountability / compassion for circumstances

Source: Module: 2 > Part A: Professional Ethics > 2.1-2.3 > Page: 48-56. This companion covers the supplied extract, not the whole module.

Ethical lenses

ETHICS COMPARISON COMPANION | CONDUCT AND CHARACTER

Classification. Descriptive ethics explains how people behave. Normative ethics asks how they ought to behave. Within normative ethics, conduct focuses on actions (consequences or duties); character focuses on virtues.

Approach	Deciding question and distinction	Watch for
Ethical egoism Consequences	What best advances the decision maker's interests? Enlightened self-interest includes longer-term trust; restricted egoism respects law and fair play.	Self-interest is the focus. Psychological egoism instead describes why people act.
Utilitarianism Consequences	Which feasible option gives the best overall balance of benefits and harms for all affected? Include short- and long-term, financial and non-financial effects.	Uncertain forecasts, difficult comparisons and serious burdens on a minority. It is not just a majority vote.
Duty and rights Duties	What action respects a duty and the rights and dignity of those affected? For duty-based reasoning, a favourable result does not by itself justify the means.	Rights may conflict. Legal, contractual and human rights have different foundations.
Justice Duties and fairness	Is the decision process fair (procedural justice)? Is the allocation of benefits and burdens fair (distributive justice)?	Fairness need not mean identical treatment. Explain which differences are relevant.
Virtue ethics Character	What would an honest, competent and courageous professional habitually do? Character develops through learning and practice.	Good character does not automatically resolve every specific conflict or replace technical competence.

Different bases for a fair allocation

Equality: equal shares. **Merit:** relevant effort, contribution or ability. **Need:** the level of need. Identify and justify the relevant basis; do not assume every difference is unfair.

Accountability. A moral agent can judge right and wrong and can be held responsible for actions. Professional knowledge supports accountability; pressure and automation do not transfer that responsibility away.

Source: Module: 2 > 2.4 Normative Theories; 2.5 Teleological Theories; 2.6 Deontological Theories; 2.7 Virtue Ethics > Page: 57-66. Study the relevant CPA study-guide sections for fuller detail.