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modern ethics



A SUPPLEMENT TO *PM NETWORK*

Standing *ON* Principle

PMI UNVEILS A REVISED
code of ethics

TO MEET THE NEEDS OF
THE GLOBAL PROFESSION.

BY JEFFREY BOULEY

*a*t its core, project management is about getting things done on time and within budget while meeting or exceeding stakeholder expectations. Yet project management practitioners must not only carry out their projects efficiently, but also with a high level of moral character in an increasingly global environment.

As part of PMI's ongoing commitment to keep up with changes in the project management profession, growth within the Institute and the evolution of ethics in general, it has revised its Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

The 15-page document declares, "We believe that the credibility and reputation of the project management profession is shaped by the collective conduct of individual practitioners. ... We believe that we can advance our profession, both individually and collectively, by embracing this Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct."

The Ethics Standards Development Committee (ESDC) facilitated the drafting of the new code based on extensive input from the global project management community. Two major concerns

shaped its thinking: helping individual project management practitioners do their jobs better and creating a sense of accountability for the entire profession's future, says Debbie O'Bray, chair of the ESDC and a former chair of the PMI Board of Directors. To reach both goals, it was important to establish a profession-wide understanding of appropriate behavior through the new code.

"We wanted to help practitioners to be individually more effective," says Ms. O'Bray, manager of the Project Management Career Centre for Investors Group in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. "But because we also believe that the actions of an individual practitioner shape the reputation of the entire profession, we wanted to set a high standard that will instill confidence in the public with regard to the project management profession and equip practitioners to make wise decisions under sometimes difficult circumstances."

Project management practitioners have great responsibilities to their clients, other stakeholders and the profession, and they rely on their reputations for success, says

Enrique Cappella, PMP, an ESDC member and a human resources business partner with Unisys in San José, Costa Rica.

“The guidelines provide us with a framework to behave within acceptable ranges of values and principles, and drive our actions to build a sustainable reputation and the sound foundations for future references within our societies,” he says.

The Straight and Narrow

This isn't the first time PMI has introduced a code of ethics. The Institute has had one in place since the early 1980s, but by the latter part of the decade, it had evolved into an ethics standard specifically for holders of PMI's Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential. Subsequently, the Institute approved a separate code of ethics for its members in 1998. This was followed the next year by the creation of member case procedures, which provided a process for the submission of an ethics complaint and a determination as to whether a violation had occurred.

The ESDC found, through input from the project management community, that members would prefer having one code of conduct for both members and for PMI-certified individuals, rather than separate

codes. In addition, both PMI and the business community as a whole had changed greatly since the code was last updated.

“When the [previous] ethics code was written, PMI and the global economy were at a different stage in maturation,” says Karen R.J. White, PMP, an ESDC member and senior director, consulting services for PM Solutions in Havertown, Pa., USA. “With the increased membership and constituency outside North America, with the heightened business awareness of ethical issues, the timing was right to revisit the code and update it to reflect these changes.”

To get the process going, PMI put together a project team—the Ethic Standards Review Committee (ESRC) to determine how to pursue an ethics revision project. After the PMI Board called for the reexamination of the codes of ethics in 2003, it commissioned the ESRC the following year to review the codes of ethics and develop a process for revising them. Ms. O'Bray led that group, just as she would be recruited to lead the ESDC in 2005.

The process the review committee developed was designed to encourage active participation by the global project management community, a move backed by the Board. “They didn't want this to be done by a handful of people locked



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in a room,” Ms. O’Bray says. With a process in place, the work went forward in 2005 under the auspices of the ESDC, which carried over some members from the review committee in addition to adding new ones.

To ensure global input, the ESDC put out a call for public comment on a draft of the code to 300,000 people in January 2006. Generating that wide range of commentary also put some stress on the process of creating a final code of ethics.

“Terminology was one huge challenge,” Ms. O’Bray says. “We’re talking about making a standard applicable to people in 160 different countries and ensuring that we have a common understanding of what terms mean, while also keeping the standard as concise and manageable as possible.”

What is or is not ethical varies across the world as well, she says. “People in some countries could be put in a difficult position by taking a stand that would be completely appropriate in [other countries] or by reporting someone for an ethics violation. So striking a balance was challenging.”

The team separated each section of the code into aspirational and mandatory components. Some provisions of the new code

are aspirational, while other provisions either require or prohibit specific behavior.

Although the challenge was great, so too was the need for PMI to take up the task, says ESDC member Lesley J. Rider, PMP, of LJ Project Associates in Johannesburg, South Africa. In most countries and sectors, she says, project management is still not seen as a profession, and there are no bodies that control behavior.

“PMI fulfills a default role of being a reference body for behavior,” Ms. Rider says. “And this PMI ethics code will be referenced globally as a standard to be aimed at.”

Increasing globalization also upped the ante, Mr. Cappella notes. “PMI is having an enormous impact in many geographies in a very rapid fashion, and the members within those geographies need an updated code of conduct and professional behavior adapted for international assignments,” he says.

Standing Up for Ethics

The new code also had to have enough bite to give it meaning and make project management practitioners accountable for behavior that runs counter to PMI’s ethical standards. At the same time, the code would have to allow for some

Breaking Down *the Code*

The revised PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is anchored in four “values that were identified as most important to the project management community.” They are:

- › **Responsibility**
- › **Respect**
- › **Fairness**
- › **Honesty.**

The code in these various areas apply to all PMI members, as well as individuals who are not members of PMI but meet one or more of the following criteria:

- › **Hold a PMI certification**
- › **Are applying to commence a PMI certification process**
- › **Serve PMI in a volunteer capacity.**

latitude in interpretation to fit the needs of so many different cultures and political and socio-economic environments.

“The question that I used when reviewing drafts of the code was, does this code support the ‘do no harm’ guidelines?” Ms. White says. “Does this code provide enough guidance to our profession as to those behaviors that are acceptable in our profession?”

Ms. O’Bray says it was sometimes difficult to agree on various concepts. “There are no easy ‘one-size-fits-all’ answers. Ethics is messy, and judgment and accountability are key factors,” she says. “But we also realized that, at some point, you have to stand for something or the standards don’t mean anything.”

The code needed to outline specific types of behaviors that are either required or prohibited in the mandatory component,

Ms. O’Bray says, while also creating principles that project management practitioners should aim to achieve in the aspirational component. Future PMI efforts may focus on creating rules targeted to individual industries, cultures, countries, industry groups and other entities, she says.

Another important factor in securing global buy-in was to have project management practitioners personally invested in the code, so the ESDC put the language in terms of what should be done. “One of our greatest challenges was to break out of the model of ‘thou shalt not,’” Ms. Rider says.

The committee decided early on that, in order to make the standard less authoritarian and more personal to project management practitioners, “we” statements would be used throughout the ethics document, Ms. O’Bray says.

“One of the good decisions we made was that we adopted an approach of writing these standards as if project management practitioners were talking to themselves and among themselves,” Ms. O’Bray says. “You can take the approach of talking to an audience, saying that you should do this or shouldn’t do that. But when you use terms like ‘we

We Are the World

Project management practitioners in dozens of nations provided comments on initial drafts of the new PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. While not every country could be represented on the committees charged with drafting the final code, a wide range of regions and nations played a role in the final decision-making process.

The Ethics Standards Review Committee 2004 designed the process by which the PMI ethics code would be revised.

Team members hailed from:

Australia Germany
Brazil South Africa
Canada United States
France

The Ethics Standards Development Committee 2005 & 2006 executed the process approved by the PMI Board of Directors, conducting the research and producing the revised code for approval.

Team members hailed from:

Bulgaria Israel
Canada Poland
Costa Rica South Africa
Germany United States
Hong Kong

➔ *Managers must balance the ideal against the practical—the need to produce a reasonable profit for the company’s shareholders with honesty in business practices.*

—R. Berenbeim, *Corporate Ethics*



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Development Committee

believe’ or ‘we expect’ as we do throughout the code, we are holding ourselves accountable as an entire group.”

Continuing the Code

In October 2006, the PMI Board of Directors made the new Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct officially part of the PMI canon, but the work is far from over. The team has recommended to the PMI Board that the standards be revisited every five years “for consistency and to adjust for new trends,” Mr. Cappella says.

A second committee was formed by the PMI Board in 2005. Chaired by Ms. White, the Ethics Standard Implementation Advisory Committee was charged with developing the implementation strategy and rollout process for the newly revised code. The recommendations of that committee are being turned over to the Code Implementation Advisory Committee (CIAC) that will ensure follow-through on issues such as how to best educate members of the profession about the code and its implications.

Ms. O’Bray says she expects there will be ongoing dialogue about ethics in the profession, both in terms of how to apply the code and how to revise it. “Fifteen years

ago, for example, there wasn’t much in the way of thoughts about how Internet-related issues might impact ethics and professional behavior. Given the corporate scandals in the past few years, awareness of this important issue has greatly increased,” she says. “Other issues will arise, and responding to them is part of the profession’s maturation process.

“When you think of the most revered professions, they tend to have strong codes of ethics, and we all want the world to see project management practitioners as highly respected and trusted professionals.” **PM**

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