

From Good Intentions to Good Governance: Ethics in Volunteer Board Leadership

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PMI Culture Value: Embrace Curiosity

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At the conclusion of the session, attendees will be able to...

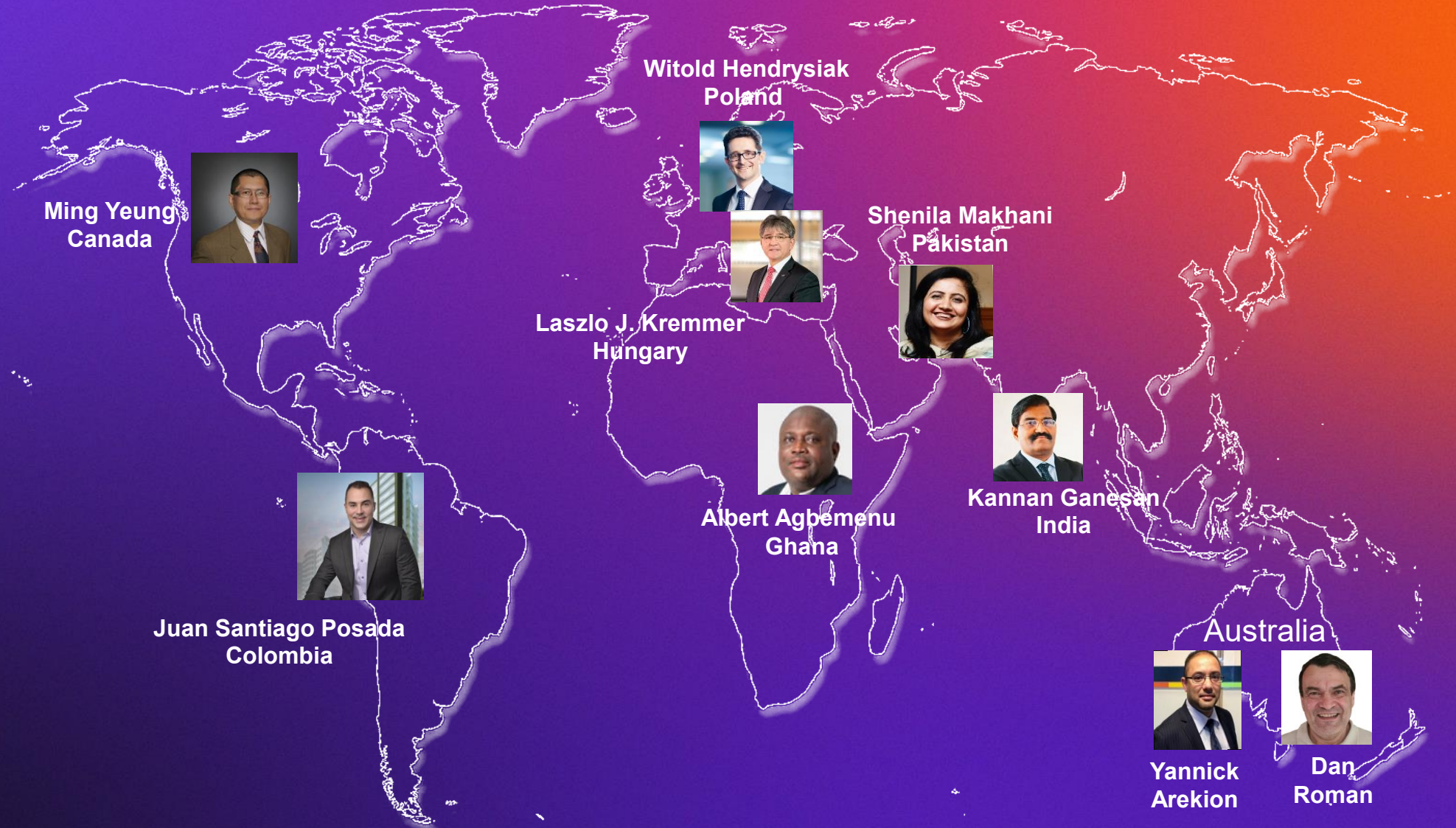
- Describe the importance of PMI's Code of Ethics in guiding members, credential holders, and volunteers.
- Distinguish the roles of the Ethics Advisory Team (EAT) and Ethics Review Committee (ERC).
- Use PMI ethics resources and tools to strengthen governance.
- Apply cross-sector collaboration to build partnerships and sustain chapter growth.

Kannan Ganesan, MA, MBA, MCA, MS, CAIIB, PMP, M.IOD



- Based in Chennai-India
- 38 years of professional experience in Banking & IT Industry
- Active PMI volunteer for 25+ years (since 2000).
- Co-Founder & past Chennai Chapter Board member for 7 years
- PMI Global Volunteer leader for 18+ years (since 2008):
 - Leadership Institute Advisory Group (LIAG-3 years),
 - Virtual Community Advisory Group (VCAG-1 year),
 - President/Community Manager of Financial Services COP (2 years),
 - Community of Practice Member Advisory Group (COP MAG-2 years),
 - Ethics Review Committee (ERC-6 years),
 - Nominating Committee (NomCom-2 years),
 - Ethics Advisory Team (EAT-2+ years) (2024-2026)
- Retired as a Vice President (IT Group Executive) & Center Head (Chennai) from FIS, a US based Banking Technology Solution provider, after serving for 23 years.
- Had served in Indian Bank for 15 years prior to joining FIS.

Meet The Ethics Advisory Team



Ethics Advisory Team-Where are we located

EAT vs ERC

Ethics Advisory Team (EAT)

Support the PMI Legal team by providing community insights, subject matter expertise and recommendations for communications and content that will facilitate understanding of and adherence to the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Ethics Review Committee (ERC)

Investigate and resolve ethics complaints in accordance with the PMI Ethics Case Procedures related to violations of the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct that have been filed against:

- ✓ PMI members
- ✓ Non-members of PMI but meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - Non-members who hold a PMI certification
 - Non-members who apply to PMI certification
 - Non-members who serve PMI in a volunteer role

EAT: What do we do?



Education

For PMI members, certificate-holders and non-member volunteers on the Code of Ethics (CoE)



Product Leader

Create tools and techniques to facilitate stakeholder understanding and application of the CoE



Advocate, Facilitate and Communicate

Translations to the over 15 official languages of the CoE, communicates ethics related issues



Collaborate

Interfaces with the PMI Research, Ethics Review Committee, and other PMI groups to share knowledge, expertise and content.

Overview of “The Code”

Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Values

Responsibility

Respect

Fairness

Honesty

Definitions

Ownership of actions and decisions

Treatment of people and resources

Objective and impartial decisions

Understanding the truth and truth-based actions

Descriptions

Honoring commitments and upholding legal and ethical rules

Good faith, being non abusive, and respect for resources

Transparency, proper handling of conflicts of interest, and proper motive in decisions

No deception or dishonest behavior

<https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/ethics/pmi-code-of-ethics.pdf>

PMI Ethics Resources

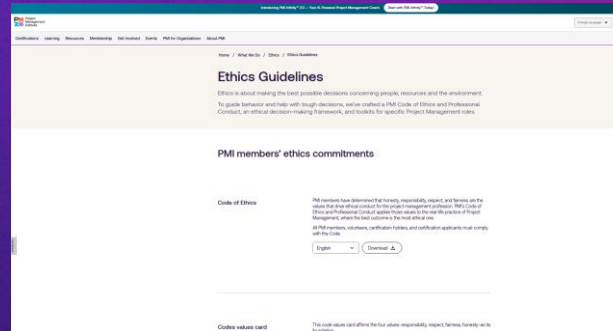
Ethics Bistro

Blogs about ethics dilemma. Updated monthly



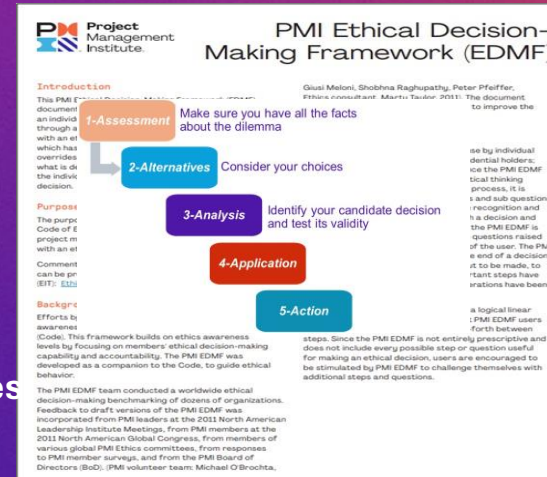
<https://www.projectmanagement.com/blogs/365304/ethics-bistro>

Ethics Guidelines



<https://www.pmi.org/about/ethics/guidelines>

Ethical Decision Making Framework



<https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/ethics/ethical-decision-making-framework.pdf>

Chapter Board Ethical Assessment Toolkit



<https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/about/ethics/chapter-ethics-toolkit.pdf>

Ethics Advisory Team

Email: ethicsinsight@pmi.org

INTRO - Derived from: Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

1. Volunteer boards are driven by passion and a desire to serve, but good intentions are not enough.
2. Ethical judgment and strong governance are essential where resources, stakeholders, and decisions intersect.
3. Clear structures and standards help move from informal, trust-based practices to accountable governance.
4. Proactively managing conflicts of interest protects the mission and builds credibility and trust. Ref:

<https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/ethics/pmi-code-of-ethics.pdf>



Common Ethics and Conflict-of-Interest Situations for Chapter Board Members

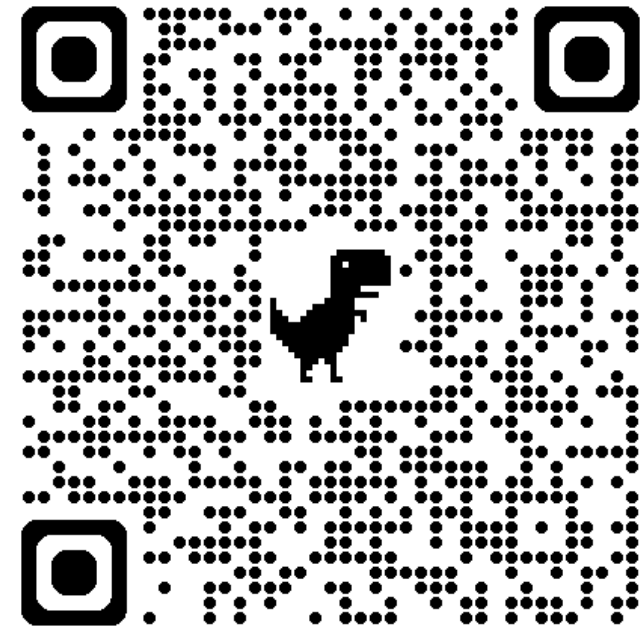
1. Board member's company (or employer) is bidding to provide training, venues, or services to the chapter.
2. Board member involved in selecting speakers, vendors, or awardees where friends, family, or their own firm are candidates.
3. Board member pushing to hire/appoint a friend, relative, or colleague without a transparent process.
4. Board member using chapter contacts or channels to promote their own or employer's business.
5. Board member holding another role (e.g., in a vendor, another association, or another PMI entity) with competing interests.



CASE STUDY

Case Study of 5 Use Cases

- Five realistic use cases for a volunteer board (tailored for a PMI chapter–style board).
- For each case: poll choices, the recommended answer, and justification linked to PMI ethics and PMBOK principles (I’ll refer to “PMBOK 8” in the sense of current PMI standards: principles-based, aligned with PMI Code of Ethics).
- Lessons learned across the cases.



USE CASE 1

The “Helpful Vendor” (Event Services)

Your chapter is planning a 2-day conference. The VP Events owns a small event management company. To “help the chapter,” they say:

“I can use my company and give you a very good price. We don’t need a formal procurement; it will be faster.”

You do not currently have a formal procurement process, but past vendors have always been selected with at least two comparison quotes.

Poll options

- A. Accept the offer immediately; trust the VP to act in the chapter’s best interest.
- B. Accept the offer but ask, the VP Events to step out of the negotiation; the President negotiates the price with them.
- C. Treat this as a conflict of interest: disclose it to the full board, obtain at least 2–3 competitive quotes, have the VP Events fully recuse from discussion and voting, and document the decision.
- D. Prohibit any board member’s company from doing business with the chapter, regardless of conditions.

USE CASE 2

The “Star Speaker” (Paid or Promotional Speaking)

Your chapter is organizing a flagship conference. A board member is a well-known agile coach and wants to be keynote speaker. They propose:

“I will speak about agile transformation. This will give visibility to my consulting business; I’m fine not being paid.”

Some board members feel it looks like self-promotion. No clear rule exists about board members speaking at chapter events.

Poll options

- A. Allow the board member to be keynote speaker with no restrictions; they are volunteering their time.
- B. Allow them to speak, but require equal opportunity for other local experts and clear selection criteria. No special treatment, and no marketing pitches.
- C. Disallow board members from speaking at any chapter event while in office.
- D. Allow them to speak only if the chapter pays them the same as external speakers.

USE CASE 3

The “Silent Discount” (Sponsorship and Personal Benefit)

A board member’s employer becomes a Gold sponsor. As part of their sponsorship, they offer:

1. Free training for chapter leaders.
2. Travel sponsorship for one board member to attend an international PMI event.
3. The sponsor quietly tells the board member:

“We’d like you to be the one who travels, since you helped us understand the chapter.”

There is no written policy about accepting such benefits.

Poll options

- A. Accept everything; this is a reward for the board member’s hard work.
- B. Accept the sponsorship but decline the travel perk entirely.
- C. Accept the sponsorship and travel perk, but the board votes to select who travels based on clear, published criteria, and documents the decision.
- D. Reject the sponsorship because of the perceived conflict.

USE CASE 4

The “Two Hats” Director (Competing Organizations)

A board member becomes president of another local professional association with overlapping mission (e.g., another PM or agile community). They say:

“I can coordinate so that we don’t schedule on the same dates, and we can share speakers.”

Over time, you notice:

- Some top speakers are directed to the other association’s events.
- Joint activities are mostly benefiting the other group.

Poll options

- A. Ignore it; the more professional communities, the better.
- B. Ask the board member to resign from one of the two boards if the dual role cannot be managed.
- C. Allow dual roles, but create and document specific guidelines on how decisions are made, what information can be shared, and require explicit recusal when interests diverge.
- D. Prohibit any board member from holding any external leadership roles.

USE CASE 5

The “Friendly Favor” (Volunteer Selection and Awards)

Your chapter is selecting the “Volunteer of the Year.” One board member strongly supports a volunteer who is also their direct report at work. In scoring, this volunteer is not the highest-rated, but the board member insists:

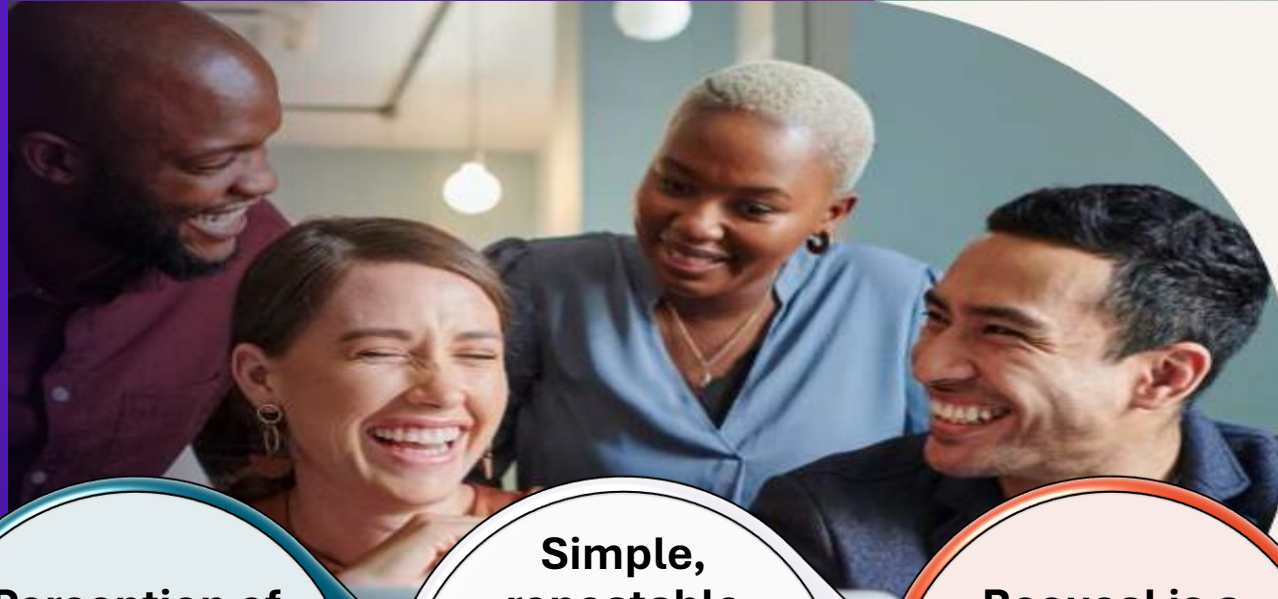
“You don’t see all the extra hours they contribute that aren’t recorded. Trust me.”

There is no formal scoring or documentation; selection has often been based on consensus.

Poll options

- A. Trust the board member’s word and award their direct report.
- B. Re-open the process, define simple scoring criteria, and ask all board members to score candidates independently before voting.
- C. Ask the board member to step out of the discussion and vote because of the personal relationship, but still decide based on the informal discussion.
- D. Cancel the award this year to avoid conflict.

Cross Case Lesson Learned



Conflicts of interest must be disclosed; silence erodes trust.

Perception of fairness is as important as actual fairness.

Simple, repeatable processes turn good intentions into good governance.

Recusal is a normal governance tool, not a punishment.

Document of disclosures, recusals, and decisions, protects & aligns.

Conclusion: Conflict of Interest & Governance

COI management protects trust, transparency, and the integrity of the chapter.

Simple practices, disclose, discuss, manage, document—keep governance volunteer-friendly.

Routine steps (COI check at meetings, clear criteria, normalizing recusal, proper minutes) turn intentions into accountable decisions.

Open, respectful handling of COIs increases psychological safety and volunteer engagement.

Aligning with PMI values (responsibility, respect, fairness, honesty) strengthens credibility with members and partners.



Board of Directors – Call to Action: “Together in Leadership”

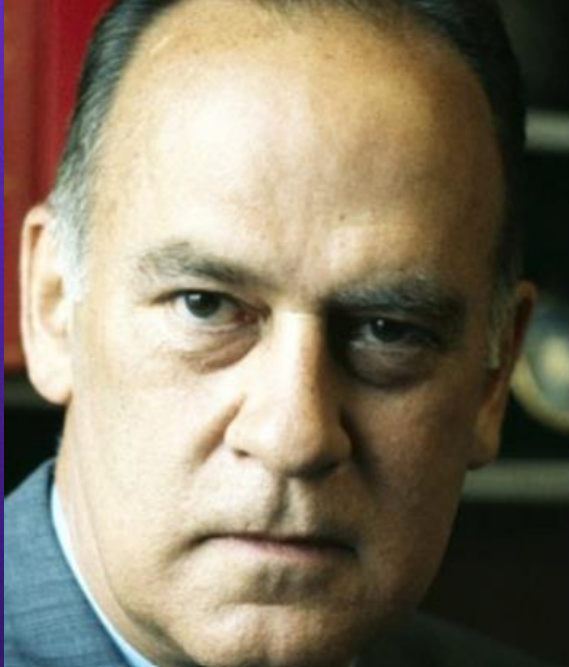
1. Lead as a unified team, not as isolated individuals.
2. Include diverse voices in discussions and decisions.
3. Foster psychological safety and open, respectful dialogue.
4. Collaborate across chapters, PMI, and local partners.
5. Model continuous learning and develop future leaders.





Ethical behavior is doing the right thing when no one else is watching—even when doing the wrong thing is legal.

— Aldo Leopold —

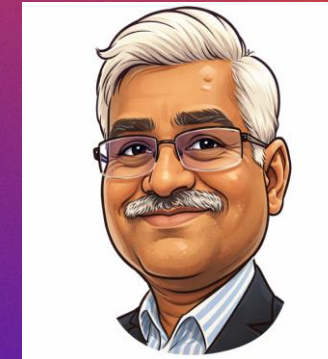



Ethics is knowing the difference
between what you have a right to
do and what is right to do.


— *Potter Stewart* —

Thank you! Let's Continue Conversation!

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