

# **Professional Ethics in the Built Environment and its Impact on Client Behavior**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Every business requires a client to survive, the client has the power to make or mar the profitability ranking of any enterprise. A client may be viewed as the main motivator of any business, the producer must always make the needs of the client a priority. A client has been defined in various quarters to practically mean the same thing. The Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB, 2015) in its Code of Practice for Project Management 5<sup>th</sup> edition defines a client as an entity, individual or organization with the right of commissioning and funding a building project either directly or indirectly. The client may also be seen as the employer, promoter, owner, purchaser or end user of the project. Considering the importance of a client in any enterprise, it is important to understand the behavior of the client and the factors which push or motivates the client to behave in a certain manner.

Ethics is said to be the code of conduct which members of an agreed shared interest agree to abide by in the conduct of their activities towards other people. “Behaving ethically is at the heart of what it means to be a professional; it distinguishes professionals from others in the market place” (RICS 2018). Professional ethics is an act of “giving one’s best to ensure that client’s interests are properly cared for, but in doing so the wider public interest is also recognized and respected” M. J. Mooring (2018). It is the character by which a set of professionals are identified with, this also ensures some degree of commitment to excellence.

According to H, G. Hurd (1967), what makes an occupation more professionalized is first its prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge and a collectivity and/or service orientation. The characteristics of professionals are:

1. Determination of a standard of education and training.
2. A student professional will go through a more far-reaching adult specialization experience than learners in other occupations
3. Professional practice is often legalized by some form of licensure
4. The licensing and admission boards are often manned by members of the profession
5. Any legislation concerned with the profession is shaped by same profession.
6. The profession guarantees an income, power and prestige ranking and often demand only the highest caliber students

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND NEED FOR STUDY**

The importance of construction professionals to an economy must not be taken as a walk in the park by all and sundry. A profession exist in the cause of the common good, though there is nothing that guarantees that all members of the profession will devote themselves to the common good. Professionals deal with people and their relationship to these people is of primary concern as they strive to meet the needs of their client or customers. In a quest to satisfy the needs of the client, professionals are often seen to be trying so hard to give them all that they want. Professionals must raise a standard so that people will want an increasingly higher quality of service, information and technical assistance (Hurd, 1967). The responsibilities that professionals have to the public as part of receiving a license to practice, is to look out for the interests not just of the few who might be our direct clients, but of the majority directly affected by what we do and by all beings who might be indirectly affected (Fisher, 2008)

The objective of this research is to hold up the mirror in the face of the construction professional for the sole purpose of professional evaluation and development. Hurd 1967 further iterated that a professional has a fair understanding of the complexity of the world and the work he does and is continuously working on his own growth, development and reflective leisure among others.

### **3. CODE OF CONDUCTS FOR PROFESSIONALS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

The practice of construction activities in any economy is governed and regulated by a professional body. Among the responsibilities of these body is the formulation of a set of ethics or codes of conduct which members of the said profession agree to be bound by. The construction industry is blessed with different professionals which can only make success if they work together as an entity. It is worth noting that all professionals in the built environment have similar codes of conduct or ethics which can be translated to mean that the interest of the client is of priority to all these professionals and their image before their client is equally important. Professionals play an important role in the development of any economy through design, construction and development of Infrastructures and Industrial Systems. Consequently, the activities of built environment professionals have a huge impact on the environment and the quality of life, health and safety of the people. The high demand for these infrastructure development and its subsequent by –product of construction continues to increase public focus on the built environment and what it does.

Professionals in the built environment include but are not limited to architects, quantity surveyors, land surveyors and engineers. All professional bodies in the built environment have agreed to conduct themselves in a manner which suggest the following:

- Honesty
- Efficiency
- Loyalty
- Integrity
- Competence

- Confidentiality
- Ensure safety, health and welfare of the public
- Conduct themselves in such a way as to always enhance the reputation of the profession
- Treat others with respect
- Take responsibility
- Only issue public statements in an objective and truthful manner

For the purpose of this research, opinions were sought from respondents on the below listed to assess how the client perceives the professional in relation to how they discharge their professional duties. A total of 245 responses were retrieved and analyzed using simple statistical tools to reveal the following summary

### **Honesty**

Never deliberately mislead, whether by withholding or distorting information. Respondents agreed that professionals in the built environment were honest with 79% rating.

### **Integrity**

The RICS explains integrity to mean never put your own gain above the welfare of your client or others to whom you have a professional responsibility. Respect their confidentiality at all times and always consider the wider interests of society in your judgements. In this aspect, respondents clearly revealed that most professionals in the built environment will often put their interest before that of the client especially if they know without a doubt that the consequences of acting with integrity will be of some disadvantage to them. This was clear with 47%

### **Efficiency**

This is a measurable level of performance that uses very minimal inputs to generate great outputs. Clients agreed that professionals who have acquired some years of experience show a recommendable level (67%) of efficiency.

### **Loyalty**

This is an act of staying firm in friendship and or support for something or someone. Professionals are not loyal to a particular client, this is revealed from the analysis 47%

### **Competence**

This is an act or character that displays a proven ability to perform a task or duty. This is often backed up by the acquisition of the relevant skill and knowledge for the task at hand. A good percentage of 82 show that professionals are competent in their chosen fields

### **Confidentiality**

This means keeping a client's personal information between you both and not discussing such with third parties. 57% of clients confirm that professionals have displayed so degree of confidentiality in the past

### **Health, safety and welfare of the public**

This is an act that ensures that the wellbeing of the immediate beneficiaries is made top priority by the use of adequate equipment and employing proper sustainable options. This got the lowest rating of 36% as very few professionals in the opinion of the respondents gave much attention the health, safety and welfare of the public.

### **Impact of professional ethics on client behavior**

The analysis reveal that clients will mostly treat professionals they have worked with in the past with the same attitude that they experienced from them. When a client understands that they will not enjoy an acceptable degree of professionalism from a said professional, they also act in same manner.

## **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The issue of ethics in professional dealings is on that must be taken with every ounce of seriousness by respective professional bodies. By the reason of this research, it is clear that through the professional will like to view themselves as a group that uphold a high level of ethics in the discharge of their duties, very little is left to be desired from the view of the client. It is important that the professional put aside any selfish interest and make the needs of the client a priority. This does not in any way mean that the professional should go out of their way because they want to make the client happy, but they must know where to draw the line.

Furthermore, professional bodies must come up with a framework on how to monitor the behavior of their members in the aspect of upholding ethics by providing an avenue where by the client can give feedback on a particular professional. This will serve as an encouragement or motivation to all professionals to ensure that they give in their best in maintaining a good working relationship with the client and will ensure that the profession is held in the best light possible by the client.

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