



Understanding the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

1. Foreword

The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is designed to help CIPS members maintain the highest levels of ethical conduct and integrity with respect to their professional activities and to ensure they provide the highest level of professional service and respect for all colleagues, allied professionals, employers/clients and the general public. It should not be construed to deny the existence of other ethical or legal obligations equally imperative, although not specifically mentioned.

Information Technology has a large impact on society. In turn, society has the right to demand professionals in this field act in a manner which recognizes their responsibilities toward society, to demand professionals of the highest calibre, and to require a mechanism to protect society from professionals who do not, or cannot, live up to these responsibilities.

Information Technology professionals are often granted privileges by virtue of their knowledge and skills; these privileges provide them with both means and opportunity to impact society in ways a layperson cannot. With acceptance of these privileges comes a corresponding obligation to conduct their professional activities in ways that serve the public, and to behave in ways that support fundamental ethical principles.

Applying ethical principles to the Information Technology profession requires an understanding of both the principles and the profession. It also requires the ability to interpret a principle in a way relevant to the professional's daily work. Frequently, situations arise that involve making judgements based on specific circumstances.... often complex, often involving conflicting ethical principles. There are varying methods to determine which ethical principle prevails.

The distinguishing marks of a profession are its acceptance by the public and the profession's acceptance of its responsibility to the public. CIPS members acknowledge that their position as Information Technology professionals carries with it certain obligations, and adherence to specific rules that assist in determination of whether or not specific activities of an individual violate the ethical imperatives.

The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct establish ethical guidelines and enforceable standards and deal with matters subject to judgement and difficult to state absolutely. They contain words and phrases which must be judged in light of professional and ethical standards in effect at a given time and place. Professionals

cannot be expected to make these judgements without guidance, nor will any two individuals necessarily come to the same “right” conclusion. Setting the standard is a responsibility of the professional organization representing these professionals.

CIPS members are expected to protect the public interest, avoid conflicts of interest, take professional responsibility and contribute to the Information Technology profession.

2. Compliance with the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

By acceptance of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, CIPS members assume an obligation of integrity and self-discipline above and beyond the requirements of laws and regulations. CIPS members are expected to become familiar with, to remain aware of, to comply with, and to not knowingly act contrary to the Code of Ethics. Unless a limitation is specifically stated, the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct apply equally to both certified and non-certified members.

Lack of awareness or misunderstanding does not excuse unethical behaviour; violators may be subject to disciplinary actions including but not limited to suspension or termination of membership and/or professional certification. All CIPS members are obligated to report any unethical behavior or violation of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct by other CIPS members.

The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is not simply a set of ideals and rules. It creates an expectation CIPS members will do the right thing in any given situation.

3. Implications of the Ethical Imperatives

The implications to the imperatives attempt to define the purpose of the Code and recognize that the Code of Ethics is not a rigid set of specifics, but rather a broad set of principles which are intended to serve an educational purpose as well as establishing general guidelines for conduct of the professional. It is assumed that they will change over time.

An overriding commitment to the public interest requires leadership, the fundamental notion of professional competence, and is about making sure information systems are understood for what they are and what they can do.

- It is about contributing to the growth of the Society, by inspiring confidence in the Society through leadership which supports our goal of serving Society’s best interests for the public good.
- It is about a CIPS member’s duty to report and to do what is right, not just legal, since often we cast a blind eye to what others are doing.
- It is about our privileged access to systems. We have the opportunity to cause harm or injury to society, and the corresponding duty to protect society.

Professionalism, competency in the profession as a whole, and leadership are attributes we want in our members.

- It is about leadership in the broader sense and self-interested benevolence in the more local sense.
- It is about the principle of professional attractiveness, and about attracting new CIPS members.
- It is about supporting professional bodies of knowledge through participation.
- It is about not allowing prejudice to interfere with work, about working with others and getting along, and about accepting others on their credentials.

A hierarchy of interests and conflicting loyalties – including self-interest (ambition, greed, etc) need to be balanced:

- It is about serving the greater good, “intelligent disobedience” when asked to take on a task in conflict with the best interests of the public.
- It is about self-interest where it can also lead to theft of an employer’s time.
- It is about recognizing the complexity that goes with being an employee. IT professionals do not have the autonomy, for example, doctors have. We are required to identify risks and the potential means to reduce them.
- It is also about defining alternative strategies to reach goals, if possible, and the implications of each strategy.
- It is about the appearance of favouritism and the risks of small ethical missteps.

Respect, integrity, fair practice, accountability, honesty, and reliability further the credibility of the Society. They lead to confidence in CIPS members and support our position as the representative of Canada’s IT professionals.

- It is about respecting privacy and honour, being law abiding, about integrity and professionalism, about ensuring information such as intellectual property revealed during the course of work is confidential unless stated otherwise.
- It is about clearly identifying qualifications for the tasks accepted and not claiming a level of competence we do not have.
- It is about expanding one’s capabilities or gaining knowledge for the purpose of increasing one’s competency and professionalism.
- It is about fair practices, recognition of the need/importance of maintaining good working relationships with others, and about being impartial.
- It is about being accountable for results, about property and ownership rights, and about contractual obligations.

4. The Process of Ethical Decision-Making

In the process of ethical decision making, when in doubt, CIPS members should seek clarification and guidance on how to interpret the Code of Ethics.

Members should follow the following steps when making ethical decisions and resolving ethical dilemmas:

- Identify the key ethical issues in the situation
- Identify what ethical imperatives are relevant to the situation
- Determine what ethical principles are of major importance to the situation and begin to implement some possible action by;

- generating alternatives and examining the risks and benefits of each
- securing additional information
- consulting with colleagues, the CIPS Registrar, or with other appropriate sources
- examining the probable outcomes of various courses of action
- Reflection (include in decision making process the feelings and intuitions evoked by ethical challenges)
- Determine action plan
- Take action (follow a concrete action plan, evaluate the plan, and be prepared to correct any negative consequences that might occur from the action taken).
- In addition, CIPS member may request interpretation, clarification or amplification of any part of the Code of Ethics.
 - Such requests may be general in nature or may refer to a particular hypothetical or real situation.
 - Such requests shall be submitted (in confidence) in writing to the Registrar's Office of CIPS.