

The Differences Between Codes of Professional Conduct and Codes of Ethics v.04¹

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In the current debate relating to the ACS's proposed changes to its Codes of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct a major point has been raised as to the difference between a Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.

This is a fundamental issue and to merge the two is a serious mistake, and a clear indication of ignorance about the two.

Professional conduct and ethics are two terms that are often used interchangeably, but they actually have different meanings. Professional conduct refers to the behavior and actions of professionals in their interactions with clients, colleagues, and the public. Ethics, on the other hand, is the study of moral principles and values that govern behavior and decision-making.

The difference between professional conduct and ethics can be summarized as follows:

1. Code of Professional Conduct: A set of guidelines that govern the behavior of professionals in a particular field. It is designed to ensure that professionals act in the best interests of their clients, maintain high standards of integrity, and adhere to the laws and regulations that govern their profession.
2. Code of Ethics: A set of moral principles that guide the behavior of individuals or groups. It is based on the belief that there are certain values that are universal and that should be upheld by all members of society. In this context the Code of Ethics would cover issues such as honesty, respect for intellectual property rights, and the obligation to use technology in ways that benefit society as a whole.

(KR-Professional Society Codes of Ethics (COE) generally meet this definition. In fact, the original ACS COE meets Ashley's definition and is "industry agnostic", see [ACS Code of Ethics \(Final 12.6.12\)](#)⁴).

Some key differences between the two:

1. Scope: The Code of Professional Conduct is specific to a particular profession or industry, while the Code of Ethics is more general and can apply to a wide range of individuals and organizations.

¹ The title in V.03 referred to "Professional Ethics" Ashley's original did not refer Professional Ethics, the error was mine.

² With permission

³ Some verify minor editorial changes by Karl Reed

⁴ <https://www.acs.org.au/content/dam/acs/acs-documents/Code-of-Ethics.pdf>

2. Legal Obligations: The Code of Professional Conduct often includes legal obligations that professionals must follow in order to maintain their licenses or certifications. In contrast, the Code of Ethics is not usually legally binding, but is instead based on moral principles and values.

3. Enforcement: The Code of Professional Conduct is often enforced by professional organizations , who can discipline or revoke the license of a professional who violates the code. The Code of Ethics, on the other hand, is enforced by society as a whole, through social norms and expectations.

4. Content: The Code of Professional Conduct tends to focus on practical issues related to the profession, such as client relationships, conflicts of interest, and professional responsibilities. The Code of Ethics, on the other hand, tends to focus on broader moral principles, such as honesty, fairness, and respect for human dignity.

They serve different purposes. The Code of Professional Conduct provides specific guidelines for professionals in the field to follow, while the Code of Ethics sets broader moral principles and values that should guide the behavior of all individuals in society.

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