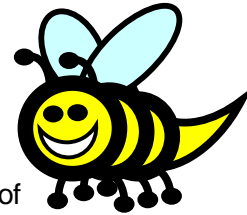


PMP Exam Tips on Ethics and Professional Responsibility, Fourth Edition

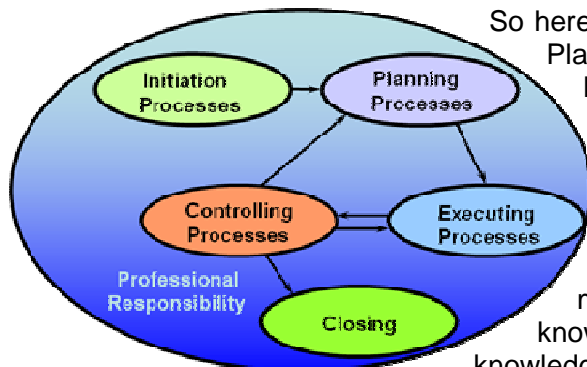
Jim Owens PMP



We always do what's right, we never do anything wrong!



The vision and purpose statement of PMI's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct begins, "As practitioners of project management, we are committed to doing what is right and honorable", sounds easy doesn't it, yet many project managers do not score highly in the section of the exam. This area will account for almost 10% of the 200 questions on the exam even though it is not covered by PMBOK, so listen up folks! Why so many questions? Well firstly it's because there are potential ethical and responsibility issues in every area of project management, and secondly because the various stakeholders involved with the projects that we manage must be able to trust us. And this domain also covers our interactions with others and in particular with cultures that may be different from your own. The Code is organized into sections on Responsibility, Respect, Fairness and Honesty. And each section is divided into mandatory standards (what you *must* do) and aspirational standards (what you *should* do).



So here are all six domains - Initiation processes, Planning processes, Controlling processes, Executing processes and Closing processes, all wrapped up in the Professional Responsibility domain.

I read in a PMP study guide recently, "Once you've obtained the PMP designation, you have an obligation to maintain integrity, apply your subject matter knowledge and project management knowledge, and maintain the code of conduct published by the PMI". Close, - but no cigar ☺, the author had obviously missed the statement at the head of the Code of Ethics and professional Responsibility, that the following are bound to uphold it:

- "All PMI members
- Individuals who are not members of PMI but meet one or more of the following criteria:
 1. Non-members who hold a PMI certification
 2. Non-members who apply to commence a PMI certification process
 3. Non-members who serve PMI in a volunteer capacity."

And the responsibilities that we have are not limited to our *own* behavior, as the Code states, "This Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct describes the expectations that we have of ourselves and our fellow practitioners". So if you know someone who is acting unethically, don't ignore it.

Moreover, you can't hang your halo on the company coat hook as you leave at the end of the day, because you are bound to uphold the code even at home.

One upside of these topics not being explicitly contained in PMBOK is that there are no inputs, tools & techniques, outputs, definitions or formulae to remember, but the downside is you have to look outside the PMBOK to find information.

So where do you find answers for the exam questions? Well a good place to start is this article :-), and of course the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, but another useful resource is the Project Management Professional Role Delineation Study, published around the year 2,000 by PMI, which identifies a number of “tasks” in the area of professional responsibility for project managers.

Task 1 “Ensure individual integrity and professionalism by adhering to legal requirements and ethical standards in order to protect the community and all stakeholders”.

This task is obviously foundational to ethical project management. Obeying the law may seem to be rather obvious advice, but bear in mind that many projects are now global in nature and so you need to be aware of the laws in force in the particular country or region where the project is to be managed, and in where the product of the project is to be deployed. Some countries may not have well-developed laws relating to your particular project, but that does not give you license to do as you wish – as you are still bound by the PMI code. The rule of thumb here is not to do anything in another country that would be illegal (or immoral) in your own country. Note that just because unethical practices may be commonplace in another country (e.g. the practice of bribing officials), does not mean that you should engage in such practices too.

Task 2 “Contribute to the project management knowledge base by sharing lessons learned, best practices, research, etc. within appropriate communities in order to improve the quality of project management services, build the capabilities of colleagues, and advance the profession”.

We are admonished to share “lessons learned, best practices, research, etc”, for it is by sharing what we have learned that the project community grows and flourishes – which is why I write these exam tips. As the profession develops, the whole project community benefits, so it is like “casting your bread upon the water, so that at a later time it may come back to you”.

But note the constraint, “within appropriate communities”. It’s great to share knowledge, but care must be taken to protect the intellectual proprietary rights of others. So if you buy a copy of a PMP study guide, you are NOT obeying the code by “sharing” illegal copies of it with others. If you have a particular revelation inspired by reading the study guide, then you can share that, but not the text of a book (even if paraphrased). Obviously there are some grey areas in there, but the rule of thumb here (and in all other responsibility areas) is: if you are not 100% sure that something is permissible, then don’t do it. You might recall the old adage, “better to be safe than sorry”.

Again, you need to be careful about sharing “lessons learned, best practices, research, etc” from your own projects, because unless you own the company, you probably don’t own the Organizational Process Assets derived from your projects, they belong to your employers. The approach here is to seek formal (written and signed) permission for release of the information – and if unsuccessful, “no” means “no”.

Finally “build the capabilities of colleagues, and advance the profession” means that you share what you know through mentoring, coaching, training (formally or informally) to help your colleagues develop. You can also achieve this by becoming a PMI volunteer, writing articles, giving presentations, and so on.

Task 3 Enhance individual competence by increasing and applying professional knowledge to improve services.

You can attend seminars and training with a view to improving your own skills and knowledge, which you can apply to your own projects and share with others. And don't just limit yourself to pure project management seminars, include personal development and people skills, as well as "green" and other ethical areas too.

But make sure you teach what you have learned should the opportunity arise, as teaching a subject will help you learn much more about it. If you don't have a PMI (or other) certification, then study for one. And to really cement what you have learned, make sure you apply it to your project management.

Task 4 Balance stakeholders' interests by recommending approaches that strive for fair resolution in order to satisfy competing needs and objectives.

Simplistically we may believe that we can satisfy all the stakeholders of our projects, but that is seldom possible. Because even in the (few :-) circumstances when we meet our scope, time and cost requirements, that doesn't mean everyone will be happy with the outcome, especially if the product, service or result produced by the product was not exactly what the customer wanted, i.e. something was lost in the translation.

It's vital for the project manager and the team to spend quality time with the customer and other stakeholders, determining what the customer (recipient of the product, service or result) actually wants, because if you don't do that, then the output of the project may agree on paper with the stated scope statement, but your project is doomed if the scope statement does not accurately reflect the stakeholder's stated and implied needs. Ethically you need to drill down to find what the customer really wants.



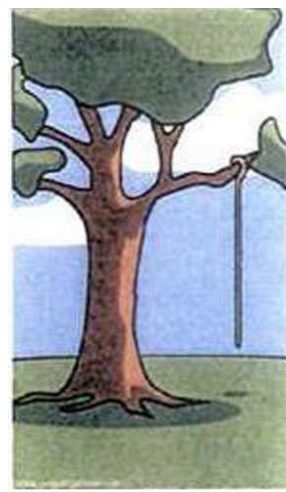
What the Customer Described



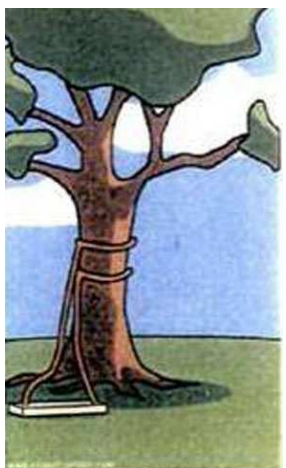
What Marketing Advertised



What got documented



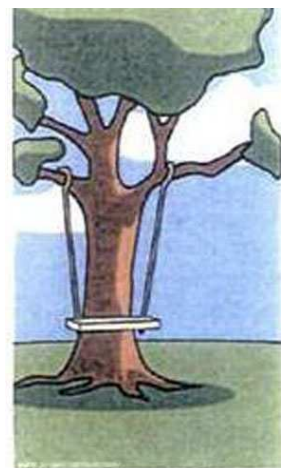
What got budgeted



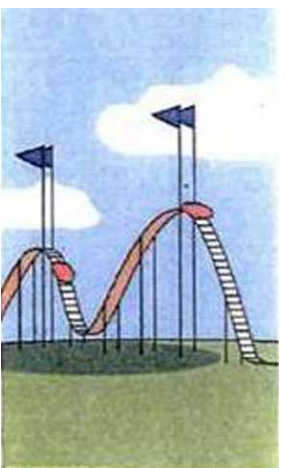
What the Engineer Designed



How Manufacturing Installed it



What the Customer finally received



What the customer was billed for



What the Customer actually wanted!

I don't know where these pictures originally came from (I first saw them in the 1970's), but I think they make the point ☺

The next problem is that even when you extract the necessary information to complete the scope statement with reasonable accuracy, there are competing requirements to deal with. This may come as a surprise to some, but not all stakeholders *want* your project to succeed, in fact it may be in their best interests for the project to fail!

There can be many reasons for this, but a simple example could be where there are environmental issues involved. For example if your project is to test drill in a wilderness area (that is home to significant flora and fauna population) to see if there are worthwhile mineral deposits, environmental groups will be counted among your stakeholders, and you can be certain that they would be very happy for your project to fail (Stakeholder: "Person or organization ... that

is actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by execution or completion of the project..." PMBOK). As an ethical project manager, you might decide that you don't want to manage such a project – conversely you (as an ethical project manager) might **INSIST** that you **DO** manage the project, to ensure that the results of the project are honest and reliable, and all stakeholders needs are considered fairly.

One mining company in Australia balances the needs to some extent by storing the soil and flora samples before mining, then backfilling and replanting the area when the mine is depleted.

But whatever, you must balance the stakeholder's needs, irrespective of your own personal allegiances.

And implicit in this task is a requirement for finding cost and time effective ways to meet the requirements, to satisfy the customer's needs as economically and quickly as possible, from a whole lifecycle view – i.e. from inception, right through to the end of the products lifespan. This means your product will be easily serviceable and maintainable, and may be disposed of (preferably recycled) without harming the environment.

Another key stakeholder in the mix is the project manager, and not only should the PM strive to avoid any conflicts of interest, but the wise PM will also strive to avoid any appearance of conflicts of interest. The rule of thumb here is to notify the key stakeholders of any real or apparent conflicts, to bring them into the open.

And finally, deal with any interpersonal conflicts between team members. There is a wise old sea-faring expression, "There are more ships lost to the worm than to the canon", i.e. if you focus only on the big ticket issues of the project itself, the festering anguish generated by ignoring unresolved team problems – which may appear comparatively trivial - could sink the entire project, unless dealt with quickly and compassionately.

Task 5 Interact with team and stakeholders in a professional and cooperative manner by respecting personal, ethnic, and cultural differences in order to ensure a collaborative project management environment.

Many projects are managed in different countries and cultures from your own, and many more have components or elements that are offshore. To be successful in such projects you will need an understanding of the laws and cultures involved. And even if the entire project is managed in your own country, more and more there is a high likelihood that

members of your team, or other stakeholders, will be from a different cultural background than your own.

It is surprisingly easy to offend people of differing cultures, and no it's not their problem, as project manager it is your problem.

In the exam you will need to know the meaning of terms such as:

Stereotype - not allowing for individual differences or exceptions. "All people from [wherever] are lazy and hard to motivate"

Generalization – opinions based on a small sample. "I know ALL about New Yorker's, I worked with one once".

Ethnocentrism - Always seeing things from your perspective. 'My way is normal; their way is not'

Culture shock – a feeling of disorientation when living or working in a different culture.

Other cultures are just as deserving of our respect as our own culture is. To do otherwise would not only be offensive (and a breach of the code) but it would also be a significant inhibitor to communication and collaboration.

Problems such as ethnocentrism are simply another form of conceit (conceit is a disease that makes everyone sick except the person who has it).

You need to understand and respect other cultures in order to negotiate contracts, to get the best out of your team, to solve interpersonal problems and to gain acceptance of the output of your project.

Depending upon the culture, you have to knowledgeable about:

Slang words and idioms (e.g. the expression "OK" has very different meanings in different countries).

Humor is one of the easiest way to offend people in most countries, so generally it is better avoided (especially concerning sex, gender, personal relationships, culture, dress, religion, politics, sport, food, or most other things :-).

Body postures (e.g. in some cultures you must never point the sole of your foot at someone), **style of dress** (including cosmetics, hairstyle and perfumes – you don't want to be mistaken for a street walker, but also some cultures have very strict dress standards). **Eye contact** – whether it should be avoided or maintained depends upon the culture.

Food (what can be eaten, can you refuse a certain dish, or must you accept it). With some cultures there is a strong religious connection with food, so it is vital that these requirement are observed when offering food. This also applies to food choices, such as vegetarian and vegan. **Touching others** is best avoided, even if they touch you, unless it is expected by the culture (but it usually excludes females).

Gift giving and receiving is expected in some cultures, but the gift should be small to avoid misconceiving the intention

There are many more, but a little research on the internet will usually help prepare you, or you can buy a book on the particular culture.

So there you have it, "As practitioners of project management, we are committed to doing what is right and honorable".

Good luck in the exam, and remember that the more practice questions you answer, the luckier you will be ☺

N.B. Some project managers may have different viewpoints or opinions to those expressed here – but PMI are marking your exam, so the PMBOK is *always* right and if I say anything that appears to contradict the PMBOK, then believe the PMBOK.

PS I've made every effort to get this right to help you in your exam – but if I've missed something please let me know.

Regards, Jim Owens PMP