
Professional Certificate Course in Administrative Law

Ethics and Professional Conduct

A

Term: Administrative Ethics

Concept: Moral principles governing behavior of public administrators.

Related terms: public service values, integrity, accountability.

Explanation: Administrative ethics guide decisions, ensuring actions serve the public interest, respect legal limits, and uphold trust.

Example: A city manager refuses a bribe from a contractor seeking a municipal contract.

Practical application: Developing codes of conduct for civil servants and providing ethics training.

Challenges: Balancing competing stakeholder interests and interpreting vague ethical standards.

B

Term: Bias

Concept: Prejudice that influences decision-making without objective justification.

Related terms: conflict of interest, impartiality, discrimination.

Explanation: Bias can be conscious or unconscious and may lead to unfair outcomes in administrative processes.

Example: A licensing officer favors applicants from their own community.

Practical application: Implementing blind review procedures and regular bias awareness workshops.

Challenges: Detecting subtle biases and correcting entrenched institutional habits.

C

Term: Code of Conduct

Concept: Formal document outlining expected ethical behavior for officials.

Related terms: standards of practice, disciplinary measures, compliance.

Explanation: The code sets clear boundaries, describes prohibited conduct, and provides guidance on handling dilemmas.

Example: A government agency's code requires disclosure of any financial interest in regulated industries.

Practical application: Distributing the code to all employees and integrating it into performance evaluations.

Challenges: Keeping the code current with evolving legal and societal expectations.

D

Term: Duty of Loyalty

Concept: Obligation of public officials to place public interest above personal gain.

Related terms: fiduciary duty, conflict of interest, good faith.

Explanation: Breaching loyalty may constitute misconduct and erode public confidence.

Example: A procurement officer awards a contract to a company owned by a family member without disclosure.

Practical application: Mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations and regular audits.

Challenges: Identifying indirect benefits and managing relationships that may appear improper.

E

Term: Ethical Decision-Making Model

Concept: Structured approach to resolve moral dilemmas.

Related terms: ethical analysis, decision tree, stakeholder analysis.

Explanation: The model typically includes identifying the problem, gathering facts, evaluating alternatives, and reflecting on values.

Example: Using the model, a regulator decides whether to waive a penalty for a first-time offender.

Practical application: Embedding the model in training curricula and decision-support tools.

Challenges: Time pressure and limited information may hinder thorough analysis.

F

Term: Freedom of Information

Concept: Legal right of citizens to access government records.

Related terms: transparency, open government, confidentiality.

Explanation: Balances public interest in disclosure against privacy, security, and commercial sensitivity.

Example: A journalist requests minutes of a city council meeting under the Freedom of Information Act.

Practical application: Establishing clear request procedures and response timelines.

Challenges: Redacting sensitive information while maintaining the spirit of openness.

G

Term: Good Governance

Concept: Framework ensuring that public administration is effective, equitable, and accountable.

Related terms: democratic accountability, rule of law, service delivery.

Explanation: Good governance incorporates participation, responsiveness, and ethical stewardship.

Example: An agency publishes performance metrics and holds public hearings on policy changes.

Practical application: Regular citizen satisfaction surveys and independent oversight bodies.

Challenges: Overcoming bureaucratic inertia and resource constraints.

H

Term: Harassment Policy

Concept: Guidelines prohibiting unwanted conduct that creates a hostile work environment.

Related terms: workplace safety, discrimination, grievance procedure.

Explanation: Policies define prohibited behavior, reporting mechanisms, and remedial actions.

Example: An employee files a complaint after receiving repeated derogatory remarks from a supervisor.

Practical application: Providing confidential reporting channels and mandatory training.

Challenges: Ensuring impartial investigations and protecting complainants from retaliation.

I

Term: Impartiality

Concept: Neutrality in performing duties without favoritism or prejudice.

Related terms: fairness, objectivity, bias.

Explanation: Impartial officials base decisions solely on law and evidence.

Example: A judge recuses themselves from a case involving a former colleague.

Practical application: Rotating case assignments and monitoring decision patterns.

Challenges: Perceived or actual conflicts that may compromise neutrality.

J

Term: Judicial Review

Concept: Court authority to examine legality of administrative actions.

Related terms: ultra vires, procedural fairness, remedy.

Explanation: Review ensures agencies act within statutory limits and respect rights.

Example: A court overturns a licensing decision for failing to provide a hearing.

Practical application: Drafting decisions with clear reasoning and record-keeping.

Challenges: Balancing deference to expertise with protection of individual rights.

K

Term: Knowledge Management

Concept: Systematic handling of information and expertise within an organization.

Related terms: institutional memory, best practices, learning organization.

Explanation: Effective knowledge management supports ethical decision-making by providing relevant precedents.

Example: A public agency maintains an online repository of past ethical case studies.

Practical application: Implementing searchable databases and regular knowledge-sharing sessions.

Challenges: Keeping information up-to-date and encouraging staff participation.

L

Term: Legitimate Expectation

Concept: Reasonable anticipation that a public body will act in a certain way based on past practice or promises.

Related terms: procedural fairness, estoppel, administrative law.

Explanation: Violating this expectation may give rise to a legal challenge.

Example: A department promises a streamlined permit process, then imposes unexpected fees.

Practical application: Documenting policy changes and providing adequate notice.

Challenges: Managing expectations while adapting to new legislative requirements.

M

Term: Misconduct

Concept: Improper or illegal behavior by a public official.

Related terms: disciplinary action, corruption, negligence.

Explanation: Misconduct ranges from minor procedural errors to serious offenses like fraud.

Example: An employee falsifies attendance records to claim overtime pay.

Practical application: Establishing clear disciplinary codes and investigative protocols.

Challenges: Detecting covert misconduct and ensuring due process.

N

Term: Non-Discrimination

Concept: Principle prohibiting unjust treatment based on protected characteristics.

Related terms: equality, affirmative action, human rights.

Explanation: Administrative decisions must be based on objective criteria, not bias.

Example: A social service agency allocates resources without regard to race, gender, or disability.

Practical application: Conducting impact assessments and regular equity audits.

Challenges: Addressing systemic disparities while maintaining neutrality.

O

Term: Obligation of Confidentiality

Concept: Duty to protect sensitive information obtained in the course of public service.

Related terms: privacy, data protection, privileged communication.

Explanation: Breaches can undermine trust and expose individuals to harm.

Example: A civil servant leaks personal data of welfare recipients to the media.

Practical application: Enforcing secure data handling procedures and training.

Challenges: Balancing transparency with legitimate confidentiality needs.

P

Term: Public Interest

Concept: The welfare or well-being of the community as a whole.

Related terms: common good, policy justification, stakeholder analysis.

Explanation: Decisions should aim to maximize benefits and minimize harms to society.

Example: Closing a polluting factory to protect public health, despite job losses.

Practical application: Conducting cost-benefit analyses and public consultations.

Challenges: Defining and measuring abstract notions of benefit.

Q

Term: Quid Pro Quo

Concept: An exchange where a favor or advantage is offered in return for something else, often illegal in public administration.

Related terms: bribery, corruption, undue influence.

Explanation: Such arrangements compromise integrity and violate ethical standards.

Example: A regulator offers expedited approval in exchange for a personal loan.

Practical application: Strict gift and hospitality policies with disclosure requirements.

Challenges: Detecting subtle or indirect quid pro quo arrangements.

R

Term: Responsibility

Concept: Accountability for actions and decisions taken in an official capacity.

Related terms: answerability, liability, duty of care.

Explanation: Officials must justify their conduct and accept consequences for failures.

Example: A department head is held responsible for a data breach caused by inadequate security.

Practical application: Implementing performance metrics linked to ethical outcomes.

Challenges: Diffusing responsibility across complex bureaucratic structures.

S

Term: Transparency

Concept: Openness in processes, decisions, and information sharing.

Related terms: openness, accountability, public scrutiny.

Explanation: Transparency reduces opportunities for corruption and builds trust.

Example: Publishing detailed procurement contracts on a public website.

Practical application: Real-time dashboards showing service delivery statistics.

Challenges: Protecting confidential information while providing sufficient detail.

T

Term: Whistleblower Protection

Concept: Legal safeguards for individuals reporting wrongdoing.

Related terms: retaliation, disclosure, ethics hotline.

Explanation: Protection encourages reporting of misconduct without fear of reprisals.

Example: An employee reports illegal expense reimbursements and is shielded from dismissal.

Practical application: Anonymous reporting channels and clear anti-retaliation policies.

Challenges: Ensuring confidentiality and preventing false allegations.

U

Term: Undue Influence

Concept: Improper pressure exerted on an official to affect a decision.

Related terms: coercion, manipulation, conflict of interest.

Explanation: Undue influence undermines independent judgment.

Example: A lobbyist threatens to withdraw funding unless a regulation is softened.

Practical application: Recording all meetings with external parties and requiring justification.

Challenges: Distinguishing legitimate advocacy from improper pressure.

V

Term: Values-Based Leadership

Concept: Guiding an organization through a clear set of ethical principles.

Related terms: ethical culture, mission statement, role modeling.

Explanation: Leaders embody and reinforce values such as integrity, fairness, and service.

Example: A director publicly refuses to accept gifts from vendors, setting a precedent.

Practical application: Integrating values into recruitment, appraisal, and reward systems.

Challenges: Aligning diverse staff motivations with overarching ethical standards.

W

Term: Workplace Ethics

Concept: Moral standards governing behavior among employees.

Related terms: professional conduct, code of ethics, organizational culture.

Explanation: Ethics in the workplace promote cooperation, trust, and compliance.

Example: Staff members collaborate honestly on a joint project without cutting corners.

Practical application: Regular ethics briefings and scenario-based training.

Challenges: Addressing cultural differences and varying personal moral frameworks.

X

Term: eX-ante Risk Assessment

Concept: Proactive evaluation of potential ethical risks before a decision is made.

Related terms: preventive compliance, risk management, due diligence.

Explanation: Identifying risks early allows mitigation strategies to be applied.

Example: Before launching a public-private partnership, officials assess conflict-of-interest risks.

Practical application: Checklists and risk-scoring tools embedded in decision workflows.

Challenges: Predicting rare or complex ethical dilemmas.

Y

Term: Yield of Ethical Audits

Concept: Findings and recommendations from systematic reviews of ethical practices.

Related terms: compliance audit, performance review, corrective action.

Explanation: Audits provide insight into strengths and weaknesses of ethical systems.

Example: An audit reveals insufficient disclosure of gifts, prompting policy revision.

Practical application: Scheduling annual ethical audits and publishing summary reports.

Challenges: Securing cooperation and ensuring audit independence.

Z

Term: Zero-Tolerance Policy

Concept: Strict enforcement stance that any breach of specified conduct results in immediate sanction.

Related terms: disciplinary action, deterrence, compliance.

Explanation: Intended to deter serious misconduct by signaling no compromise.

Example: An agency enforces immediate termination for any employee caught fabricating documents.

Practical application: Clear policy statements and swift, consistent enforcement.

Challenges: Balancing fairness with rigidity, especially for minor infractions.