

Business and Local Government: Prevention of Unethical Conduct

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Abstract. The case describes the developments of an ethics code observed in the local government of Suffolk County, New York, USA. In Suffolk County, there is now a dedicated Board of Ethics Agency (“Board”) within the local government to ensure that business operations and government operations run as ethically compliant as possible. This Board was created in 2012 in order to follow compliance with a law that established a replacement for the Ethics Commission (previously existing within Suffolk County) because this Ethics Commission had been involved in a serious controversy. The former County Executive, Steve Levy, was found guilty of compromising the “integrity of an ethics commission”. Suffolk County government prescribed various measures in order to ensure that the citizens of Suffolk County were protected from business ethical violations. The Board also preemptively created laws that discouraged businesses from acting unethically.

Keywords: ethics, local government, business ethics, Suffolk County Departments, Suffolk County Board of Ethics.

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1. Introduction

The case portrays the development of regulations to secure ethical conduct in local government and public administration, and in particular in dealings related to local businesses in Suffolk County on Long Island, NY. This example has educational merit due to the insights into (un)ethical behavior of local government officials and the relevant ethical terms and definitions that are emphasized and learnt.

Ethics is a word that we regularly use to signify a set of rules or a code that one should follow in order to live in such a way that is morally just.¹ That being said, there is more to this word than a simple definition or explanation.

1. James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986. ISBN 0877224056

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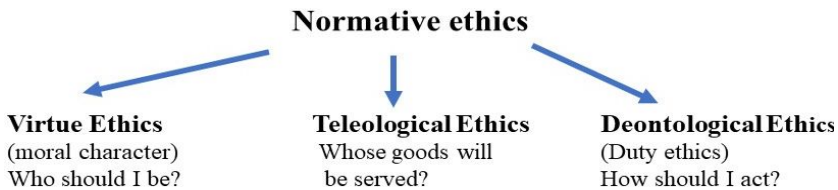
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Sometimes, the best way to figure out what ethics means in any given situation is to see and understand the terminology in action. Therefore, when we turn to business ethics, we are normally studying the approach to business practices with “morally just” sets of principles in order to ensure the fairness to all concerned.² This is best accomplished through the combination of theories related to philosophy and business.³

In philosophy, there are many individual depictions of ethics. Two important categories are “normative” and “applied” ethics.⁴ Both of these ethical theories surround morality as it approaches different types of conduct. In these situations, morality can be used to describe the set of beliefs that set one’s behavioral patterns. The beliefs in this case are usually held by more than just one individual and are based on something set in stone, such as a set of guiding rules. These categories of ethics allow for a wider understanding of many philosophers’ views. By taking apart the different categories, we can understand better which category is most suited to a given business situation.⁵

Additionally, normative ethics revolve around arriving at a standard of morals which then regulate right and wrong conduct or behaviors. This is a practical model for behavioral criterion.⁶

Within normative ethics, there are three separate groups of theories: virtue ethics theory (moral character), duty/deontological theory, and consequentialist theory.⁷ Here is a chart to illustrate normative ethical approaches:



2. Patricia H. Werhane, R. Edward Freeman, *Business Ethics: The State of the Art*, International Journal of Management review, 21 May 2003. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-2370.00002?casa_token=KteZRH31mBUAAAAA:2CBinZxllT5yTkCThBcgV4l9RDXaexw63B0yGfA-vd9aEnUu4t0QQtcoTq7ovsj6YjgtcKNXRQvOxiat
3. John C. Maxwell, *Ethics 101: What Every Leader Needs To Know*, May 11, 2005, ISBN-10: 9350098741
4. Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* 1st Edition, Routledge 2014, ISBN-10 : 1844652580
5. James Fieser, (n.d.). *Ethics*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource. Retrieved from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/#H2>
6. Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, *Normative Ethics, Metaethics and Applied Ethics: Three Branches of Ethics*, CAMBRIDGE, UK: OPEN BOOK PUBLISHERS, 2017, [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.11647/OBP.0125](https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0125) Retrieved from: <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/phi220ethics/chapter/a-simple-explanation-of-normative-ethics-metaethics-and-applied-ethics-what-is-the-difference/>
7. Jadranka Skorin-Kapov, *Professional and Business Ethics Through Film: The Allure of Cinematic Presentation and Critical Thinking*, 2019. London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan. (ISBN: 978-3-319-89333-4)