

## Principles of Good Practice

Institute of Public Administration Australia **Queensland**

### Codes of **Values and Ethics**

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) Queensland has developed the Principles of Good Practice series of guidelines to champion good practice in the public sector. The principles cover hot public sector issues to encourage debate and discussion amongst those involved in the profession whether in government agencies, academia, the private or community sectors or in politics.

The Codes of Values and Ethics Principle outlines what you need to know about codes of values and ethics, implications, challenges and ideas on achieving good practice.

#### **Values and Ethics**

- Values can be defined as enduring beliefs that influence the choices we make while ethical behaviour is morally accepted as 'good' and 'right' in a particular context.
- Values and ethics are critical to organisational effectiveness and have been linked to a stronger culture, higher levels of commitment and lower turnover.
- Values need to be embedded into organisational culture before they can form a strong framework for making decisions and responding to emerging issues.

#### **Current practice**

- Australia's response to promoting values and ethical behaviour has primarily been to develop formal codes of values and ethics.
- The codes are intended to provide reassurances of probity, guidelines for action, and promote a unified and consistent public service by guiding and regulating behaviour.
- However there is still autonomy within the system as each level of government has its own process and individual agencies can adapt codes of values and ethics to their own specific requirements.
- How effective are codes of values and ethics? They do go some way towards encouraging good practice, however, research shows that organisational and group norms have a far greater influence on behavior.
- Leaders have the greatest opportunity to positively impact upon ethical behavioural norms and to lead the way in ethical decision making.

#### **Recommendations for Good Practice**

**Critical success factor** The success of effective behavioural change hinges on leaders modeling the behaviours they are trying to achieve. Inconsistency between codes of values and ethics and leaders' behaviour can quickly undermine the potential for positive, ethical change within an organisation. Leaders have the opportunity to become champions for ethical behaviour by: modeling the values; openly discussing ethical dilemmas and how they would go about resolving them; and showing no tolerance for unethical behaviour.

**Embedding codes** Good codes of ethics and values guide behavior and decision making by being substantial, relevant and reflective of the key roles and responsibilities of the sector, agency or work unit concerned. However, a good code also needs to be implemented strategically. The following recommendations can assist in successfully embedding codes of values and ethics in organisations:

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- **Performance management** – Use codes of values and ethics in organisational planning, linking incentives to desirable ethics and values outcomes. This should also flow on to individual performance management.
- **Learning and development** – Train staff in ethical decision making, ensuring they understand the organisation's values, know the process to follow to tackle an ethical dilemma and have the skills to make sound, ethical judgments.
- **Induction** – Incorporate ethics and values into induction programs, letting staff know where they can get more information and who they see for advice or assistance.
- **Abiding by the Code** – Establish a fair system for dealing with breaches of the code and train those who administer the process.
- **Feedback** – Provide channels for feedback from staff, clients and stakeholders.

#### **Ethics Test**

A practical way to think about ethical dilemmas is to ask yourself these simple questions.

1. Am I prepared to have my actions reported on the front page of the newspaper?
2. Would I be embarrassed to tell my mother what I've done?
3. If my actions became public, would they embarrass my fellow employees?

#### **Something for you to think about...**

- How effective do you think formal values statements or codes of conduct are?
- Do you think that more effort should be spent on creating a culture that supports ethical decision making through effectively applied leadership?
- Is there an appropriate balance between the traditional and new values in your organisation?
- Are values and ethics effectively role-modelled within your agency?
  - What else could organisations be doing to promote ethical decision making?
  - Do you know of a good case study where ethical decision making was practiced or not practiced?

**Tell us what you think! Email: [POGP@qld.ipaa.org.au](mailto:POGP@qld.ipaa.org.au)**

Concepts in this Fact Sheet are discussed further in the

**FULL VERSION**  
of this Principle. Please see

[www.qld.ipaa.org.au](http://www.qld.ipaa.org.au)

