

Skills for Professional Practice Written Assignment

This report discusses an ethical dilemma within the construction industry. The scenario is as follows; I am the project manager overseeing the construction of a new, government funded hospital and I have been informed by an engineer that a supplier has been providing a sub-standard concrete mix which will affect the durability and safety of the build. This report will explore the options I would have as a project manager in this situation, as well as the impact of each of these actions, with reference to professional ethics within the construction industry. It is vital that one uses a framework of professional ethics when confronted with dilemmas such as this one because there are not only financial impacts to these decisions, but these decisions can cause safety issues which could result in harm to people involved in the project, end-users of the build and the public. I will use the framing of professional ethics to decide whether I will report and fix the issue, ignore the issue, or attempt to seek a compromise. I have chosen to explore this scenario through the framework of virtue ethics. This means that the decisions an individual makes and the actions that an individual takes should reflect virtues which a 'good person' would have. This includes honesty, integrity and courage.

Ethics should be considered before making decisions in construction especially in dilemmas such as the one posed in this essay. This is because acting in an unethical way can have negative consequences such as losing your professional reputation, credibility or trustworthiness, facing legal

penalties, and being removed from institutions such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors or the Association of Project Managers. These professional institutions have strict codes of conduct that their members must abide by to ensure that their members are acting in a professionally ethical way and to create a culture of trustworthiness and reliability within the construction industry. Being a member of a professional organisation such as RICS is a way to demonstrate to clients and employers that you are competent and capable of performing your role as a surveyor or project manager and that you are going to conform to ethical standards within the industry. Failure to act regarding professional ethics and these institutions' codes of conduct could result in you having your membership or chartered status revoked. This could make it harder for you to get clients in the future and perhaps limit your employment opportunities. The RICS code of conduct clearly states '*members and firms must be honest, act with integrity and comply with their professional obligations, including obligations to RICS.*' (RICS, 2021) Delivering a project that does not meet standard requirements, knowingly, would be in clear violation of this rule.

Firstly, I should consider the potential consequences of this issue. The sub-standard mix could cause harm if it loses its integrity, especially under heavy loads. While the supplier might have informed me that the concrete mix "meets practical standards" and therefore the risk of a catastrophe may be low, a project manager should decrease risks of harm as much as is reasonably practicable. There are examples of substandard concrete being used in the UK construction industry as shown in the article Agency (2023)

which describes how schools had to be evacuated and shut down due to the use of sub-standard concrete mixes. If this was discovered after the hospital was opened, then this could prevent patients from receiving essential and perhaps lifesaving care.

Furthermore, as the principal contractor you have a duty of care to the end users to provide quality workmanship. Therefore, even if it is not explicitly stated in the contract that there is a specific quality of concrete mix that you are required to use, you have a duty to do so and common law states that both the contractor and or the supplier (depending on the circumstances) can be held liable by the client for the defects. (Warley, 2003)

It should also be considered that it is in the supplier's interest to misrepresent this information as they could face legal, financial and reputational consequences if it becomes apparent that their concrete mix is of a lesser quality than is required. If I were to report the issue, it could lead to a loss of reputation for my firm and the supplier. Also, the job would be delayed and more costly. This means that more taxpayer money would be spent on the project and both my firm and the supplier could lose out on future work meaning that both of our workers could be financially affected. While there is likely a contingency for delays to the project, the hospital is going to be an essential service upon completion and if that completion date is pushed back it could put more pressure on other health services in the meantime which

could result in some local people being unable to receive healthcare that they need.

However, on the contrary, if the substandard concrete mix goes unreported, and thus the defect in the superstructure is not rectified, if it is discovered at a point in the future then the hospital may have to be evacuated while the issue is being resolved. The contingency plan for this scenario is likely not as thorough as the contingency plan for delays in the project during the build so the consequences could be much more costly.

Additionally, even if safety is not jeopardized by the substandard concrete mix, the lifecycle of the hospital could be shortened meaning that repairs or rebuilds would be required earlier than necessary and there would be more taxpayer money required from this. It should also be noted that any building defects that go undetected until they are discovered years in the future may still have to be rectified by the original contractor according to the Building Safety Act (2022). (GOV.UK, 2022)

After considering all the different consequences of reporting or not reporting this issue, I have concluded that the best decision to make, while ensuring that I am acting in a way that is professionally ethical, is to report the issue

and accept the cost of fixing the issue and the delays to the project. This is because through the lens of the virtue ethics it is important to take honest actions and take actions with regard for others as these are virtuous acts. To let this issue go unreported would be dishonest and could cause others physical and financial harm. While the consequences of this are great, the consequences of ignoring this issue, as I have demonstrated, appear to be far greater.

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