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LEVEL 4 – Skills For Professional Practice – Assignment 1

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The Compromised Concrete Mix

You are the project manager on a large-scale construction project — a new hospital funded by the government. The project is under intense pressure to meet a strict completion deadline, as delays would lead to heavy financial penalties and public criticism.

Midway through the project, an engineer reports that the concrete supplier has been providing a mix that does not meet the specified strength requirements. The discrepancy is small but could affect the long-term durability and safety of the structure, especially under heavy loads.

The site supervisor insists that redoing the affected sections would cause weeks of delay and millions in cost overruns. He also reminds you that your company has a reputation for on-time delivery and that the client might withhold future contracts if this project is delayed.

The supplier, when confronted, argues that the concrete still “meets practical standards” and quietly offers to provide a discount on future deliveries if you agree to let the issue pass.

You now face a dilemma: whether to report and fix the issue, ignore the issue or try and seek a compromise.



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Introduction

This report will analyse an ethical dilemma arising on a large public construction project, being the construction of a new government funded hospital, the report examines the conflicting pressures between safety, professional responsibility, construction ethics and the commercial performance of a building. The situation involves finding out that concrete supplied to the project does not meet the specified strength requirements, thus creating a dilemma for the main contractor between meeting project deadlines or ensuring structural safety. Ethics is highly important in construction due to the sectors reliance on public trust, the long term safety implications of the structures and the legal duties placed on professionals such as myself as a project manager. A Failure to act ethically can result in injury, financial loss, reputational damage, Legal issues and breaches of professional codes of conduct set in place by the British Government.

The Ethical dilemma

Midway through the hospital project, an engineer reported that the concrete delivered to the site is below the specified strength grade, although the discrepancy is not extreme, it could compromise the long term durability of the structure, particularly under heavy load conditions which it is likely to experience in a hospital. The site supervisor has argued against the remedial work emphasising the potential weeks of delay, significant cost implications, and the potential reputational harm for delivering the project late. The supplier insists the concrete " still meets practical standards " and offers a discount on future orders if the issue is ignored.

The ethical issue brought to light is on whether it is right to proceed with potentially substandard material to meet deadlines or whether the project manager being myself has a duty to report and rectify the issue despite commercial repercussions. The Key parties involved include myself , the site supervisor, engineer, concrete supplier, the client in this case the government and future users of the building. The potentially affected stakeholders extend far beyond the immediate project team, patients, medical staff, government agencies, and the wider public could all be impacted by compromised structural safety, and hence it is important that I do not make this decision lightly.

What are the available options ?

As the project manager I believe that I have two possible courses of action in relation to this issue each option with its own positive/negative consequences and thus benefitting/harming parties. The first of which being to report the issue and redo the affected concrete section;

Positives

- Ensures compliance with design specifications and safety standards.
- Protects the long term structural integrity of the hospital.
- Aligns with legal requirements under UK construction law and professional codes
- Maintains trust with the client and demonstrates ethical leadership.

Negative consequences

- Significant project delays and financial implications
- Potential damage to the company's reputation for timely delivery.
- Possible conflict with senior management and site supervisors

Benefitting / Harmed Parties

- Beneficiaries: Future hospital users, client, the wider public.
- Potentially harmed: Contractor financially, project team reputationally

Option 2: Ignore the issue and continue with construction

Positives

- Project remains on schedule, avoiding penalties.
- Company reputation for timely completion is preserved in the short term.
- Relationships with the supplier and internal managers remain smooth.

Negative consequences

- Risk of structural failure in the future, endangering lives.
- Violation of British safety standards and professional codes
- Serious legal, financial and reputational consequences if discovered later
- Loss of public trust, particularly because this is a government funded project.

Benefitting / Harmed Parties

- Beneficiaries: Contractor, supplier.
- Harmed: Hospital users, client, the main contractor (Long Term)

What Is the Right Thing to Do?

Throughout this report I have applied deontological ethics, which focuses on duty and adherence to rules.¹ From a deontological standpoint, I as the project manager have a professional and moral obligation to ensure that construction of the hospital meets specified safety requirements, regardless of any consequences. The duty to protect life and ensure safe construction outweighs considerations of cost, reputation and programme, allowing substandard concrete to be used violates established rules regarding construction quality and safety, meaning that ignoring the issue or compromising would be ethically and morally wrong.

Rules and Responsibilities

Professional bodies in Britain emphasise a culture of safety, honesty and integrity. The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) Code of Conduct requires members to “ensure that all work undertaken is in accordance with good practice and current standards.”² and also mandates that professionals must report any issue that may pose a risk to public safety.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Rules of Conduct require members to “act with integrity,” “provide a professional service,” and “comply with relevant legislation”³. These rules clearly prohibit accepting substandard work or concealing defects.

Additionally, the UK Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 place legal duties on stakeholders to ensure that construction work is carried out safely and to prevent foreseeable risks. These regulations state that “A person working on a project under the control of another must report to that person anything they are aware of in relation to the project which is likely to endanger their own health or safety or that of others.”⁴ Allowing inadequate concrete and not reporting the matter would violate these statutory obligations.

Finally, the Government (2022) — Building Safety Act 2022 — introduces a new set of guidelines for higher risk buildings, codifying the responsibilities of ‘dutyholders’ (clients, designers, contractors, building control) to ensure compliance and building safety through the lifecycle of the building. Defects, unsafe materials or non compliant work are included under the scope of reportable safety risks.⁵

¹ Fan, L.C. and Fox, P.W., 2009. Exploring factors for ethical decision making: Views from construction professionals. *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*

² CIOB. (2018) *Rules and Regulations of Professional Competence and Conduct*

³ RICS. (2021) *Rule of conduct*.

⁴ HSE. (2015) *The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015*

⁵ Government. (2022) *Building Safety Act 2022 introduction of new regime for higher risk buildings*.

Decision

The most ethical and professionally responsible action is Option 1: which would be to formally report the issue and arrange for the defective concrete to be replaced, this decision aligns with legal obligations, professional codes of ethics and my responsibility as the project manager to protect public safety. Although delays and financial penalties are significant concerns, they do not outweigh the long term risks associated with structural weakness, transparency with the client and clear documentation of the decision making process will further demonstrate professional integrity. By upholding safety and ethical standards it will not only ensure compliance but also the preservation of public trust in the construction process.

Conclusion

To Conclude, this report has examined the ethical dilemma arising from the discovery of substandard concrete in a major hospital construction project, after evaluating the options and considering professional duties, legal requirements, personal morals and ethical principles I have decided that the most appropriate course of action is to report and rectify the issue. Ethical decision making is essential in construction because the consequences of poor choices can be severe and long lasting, ensuring safety and compliance protects both the public and trust/professionalism in the construction industry.

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