



University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

REPORT **SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ACBA4027**

Course: HNC Quantity Surveying

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Introduction

In this report, we can analyse an ethical dilemma that occurred during the construction of a government-funded hospital. Midway through the project, it was detected that the concrete supplier had been supplying a mix that did not meet the specifications required. And despite the discrepancy being small, it could compromise the building's durability and safety.

We will explain why ethics are important in construction and how decisions can directly impact people's safety, public trust, government funding, and professional reputations. Building with integrity is a technical and moral obligation. We must always do things the right way.

Description of an Ethical Dilemma in a Construction Project

The Compromised Concrete Mix

I am the project manager on a large-scale construction project in 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 to me 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 me that my company has a reputation for delivery on-time 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 I agree to let the issue pass. I now face a dilemma: whether to report and fix the issue, ignore the issue or try and seek a compromise.

The ethical problem

In summary, an engineer reported that the supplied concrete does not meet the required strength standards. However, the site supervisor is opposed to redoing the affected sections, arguing that it would cause significant delays and cost overruns. When I confronted him, the supplier played down the issue and offered a future discount if the matter was ignored. In my opinion and regarding ethical behaviour, this discount offered by the concrete supplier is considered bribery, and therefore bribery is corruption.

The ethical issue is whether to address the problem, which would have financial and time implications, but would be the right thing to do, or to ignore it, which could compromise structure's safety, potentially leading to collapse. This would result in long-term monetary losses and the need for new investment in a new infrastructure for the same project.

People involved:

- The engineer who identified the issue
- The site supervisor
- The concrete supplier
- The client (government)
- Future hospital users (public)
- Myself, as the project manager.

People affected:

- Patients and hospital staff (structural risk)
- The construction company (reputation and future contracts)
- The public (trust in public infrastructure).

Options and Consequences

Option 1: Report and resolve the issue.

Positive outcomes:

- Ensures structural safety
- Upholds professional ethics
- Protects hospital users

Negative outcomes:

- Significant delays to the project
- Additional costs for the concrete supplier and client.
- Potential loss of future contracts due to missed deadlines.

Beneficiaries: Hospital users and the long-term reputation of the company.

People affected: Construction company (short term) and supplier.

Option 2: Ignore the problem and continue

Positive outcomes:

- The project is on schedule.
- The concrete supplier and supervisor avoid immediate financial penalties.

Negative outcomes:

- Long-term structural risk
- Potential scandal if discovered
- Damage to professional reputation

Beneficiaries: Construction company (short term); supplier

People affected: Hospital users, public trust and project manager.

What is the right thing to do? (Ethical Thinking) According to deontological reasoning.

Let us see what deontological reasoning is and what it says. Deontology is one type of normative theory in modern moral philosophy that addresses what decisions are ethically required, forbidden or permitted. Deontology places particular focus on the connection between human morality and obligation and prioritises integrity and responsibility over outcomes. Thus, using deontological reasoning, the best option is to report and resolve the issue. As professionals, we have a duty to uphold technical and ethical standards, regardless of the economic consequences. Safety and honesty are not negotiable. Upholding these duties means acting transparently with the client, ensuring that the structure meets all the necessary specifications and refusing to compromise public trust for short-term gains. By adhering to established codes of conduct and prioritising our responsibility to protect lives, we demonstrate integrity and bolster the long-term credibility of the project and the profession. (Alexander, L. and Moore, 2024)

What is the right thing to do? (Ethical Thinking) According to a professional code.

Professional code

“Ethics and Ethical behaviour are central to professionalism. It does not matter how skilled and experienced a person becomes: if they behave dishonestly and without regard for the rights of others, they are not a professional person.” (CIOB, 2025)

According to the CIOB (Chartered Institute of Building) Code of Conduct, members must uphold the highest standards of professional behaviour. This includes acting with integrity and honesty in all decisions, prioritising public safety above commercial or personal interests, and reporting any practice that compromises quality or safety.

These principles are not optional guidelines but binding duties that define the credibility of the professionals. Integrity ensures that construction professionals remain transparent and accountable, while the commitment to safety protects the lives of those who will use the built environment. Reporting unsafe or substandard practices is a direct responsibility, as silence or concealment can lead to long-term risks and undermine public trust.

In this case, ignoring the problem with the compromised concrete mix would directly violate these principles. It would not only constitute a breach of professional ethics but could also be considered professional negligence, exposing both the project and the individuals involved in legal, reputational, and moral consequences. By contrast, addressing the issue demonstrates compliance with the code, reinforces accountability, and safeguards the integrity of the construction industry.

What do the rules say about safety, honesty, or doing the right thing?

Professional codes of conduct in the construction industry, such as those from the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), emphasise that safety, honesty and integrity are non-negotiable responsibilities. (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), 2021)

Safety: Professionals must prioritise the health and safety of the public, workers and future users of the structure. Any action that knowingly compromises structural integrity, even slightly, violates this duty.

Honesty: Members are expected to transparently report any defects, errors, or unethical practices. This mostly applies to site supervisors and project managers. Concealing or downplaying a known issue, such as the use of substandard concrete, breaches this obligation.

Doing the right thing: These codes require professionals to act in public interest, even when this conflicts with commercial or personal gain. Upholding trust in the built environment is a core ethical duty.

In this case, the rules clearly support taking action to address the compromised concrete and ensure that the structure meets all safety standards, while also ensuring that the issue is handled with full transparency. Ethical leadership means embodying the values that these rules represent, particularly when lives and public trust are at risk.

My decision:

As project manager, it is my responsibility to report the issue and rectify the affected sections. This approach is both ethical and professional and is in line with the code of conduct. While this approach may incur costs and cause delays, it protects lives, maintains the integrity of the project, and strengthens the long-term of the organisation and the reputation of its professionals.

Conclusion

In accordance with Rules of Conduct (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), 2021) which covers behaviour in construction, “Members and firms do not mislead others by their actions or omissions, or by being complicit in the actions or omissions of others.” So, the decision to repair the defective concrete demonstrates a commitment to ethics, safety, and professional responsibility. In construction, ethical decisions not only define the quality of a project but also the level of trust that society places in those who build it. Doing the right thing often means avoiding demands and major problems. It is recommended that all actions be documented and that independent testing of the concrete be conducted to support the decision.

References

Alexander, &, L. and Moore, M. (2024) *Deontological Ethics*, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

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