





PLURAL VIEWS  
COLLECTION

# Ethics in Public Relations

## Web Archives 2010-2011

from the former  
Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications



A publication of the  
SUSTAINABILITY|COMMUNICATION Group,  
produced under the direction  
of Solange Tremblay in  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to reiterate our thanks to all the organisations, public relations professionals and academics who supported this initiative, as well as to the editorial team and all the colleagues who were members of the Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communication.

Our thanks also go to UQAM and the numerous experts and organisations who contributed to the the vitality of the Centre during its years of operation.

## PREAMBLE

Produced with the sponsorship of the Canadian Public Relations Society and the support of several other organizations, *Ethics in Public Relations*, a section of the website of the now dissolved Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications\*, reflects the state of the professional community's questions about ethics in public relations at the end of the first decade of the 2000s.

During the active years of the Centre (2003-2010), the team dedicated to ethical issues in public relations\*\* was behind various achievements and collaborations. The *Ethics in Public Relations* web pages were among them. They were posted during the 2010-2011 period after the translation of the French version already online. The SUSTAINABILITY|COMMUNICATION Group\*\*\* is pleased to gather them here in booklet format.

Each page is reproduced as a screenshot, as published on the site during those years, except for some notes inserted in the document, giving access to the publications or web resources mentioned, but according to their current content in 2022.

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\* The Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications, initiated by Solange Tremblay in 2003, was an entity of the *Chaire de relations publiques et communication de l'UQAM* – whose name, *Chaire en Relations publiques*, created in 2001 by its founder, Danielle Maisonneuve, was used until 2007.

\*\* Especially Gabrielle Collu, Deanna Drendel, Rhita Cossette and Geneviève Bernatchez.

\*\*\* Since the closing of the Centre at the end of 2010, the team has restructured and continues its activities under the name SUSTAINABILITY|COMMUNICATION Group.



**SCREENSHOTS**  
**Archives 2010-2011**



Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications

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Director : **Solange Tremblay**

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### Ethics in Public Relations

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We cannot begin to discuss public relations ethics without asking ourselves such basic questions as: What's the difference between ethics and codes of professional standards? What references are available? What decision-making tools exist to assist in resolving ethical dilemmas?

In this website, the **Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications** is pleased to present a general framework of reference to guide public relations and communications professionals as they strive to assume their increasingly complex responsibilities.

This section will be enriched with new information on a regular basis. We hope you will visit us often.

## Our supporters

These pages are supported by the **Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS)** and its Ethics Network.



They also reflect input derived from a number of joint initiatives with various organizations:

- **SQPRP**  
Société québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques
- **IABC**  
International Association of Business Communicators
- **PRSA**  
Public Relations Society of America
- **Global Alliance**  
Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

*The Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications wishes to express its gratitude to Danielle Maisonneuve, PhD, founding chairholder of the Chair in Public Relations and Marketing Communications, for her valued support in developing this section.*

*Our thanks also to Gabrielle Collu, PhD, APR, chair and co-founder of the SRQ's Ethics Committee (2002-2005), as well as Audrey Martin and all those who served on this committee during this period.*

*And our sincere thanks to **CNW TELBEC** for its assistance in translating this section.*



Page 8 - Associations Links:

- **CPRS**  
Canadian Public Relations Society
- **SQPRP**  
Société québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques
- **IABC**  
International Association of Business Communicators
- **PRSA**  
Public Relations Society of America
- **GLOBAL ALLIANCE**  
Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

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## Glossary

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Ethicists have not yet agreed on a single definition for the various terms relating to morality and ethics. The definitions, which reflect the various possible angles from which the subject can be examined, also bespeak the contexts within which each author's reflections are framed. A few suggested definitions – selected for their simple and practical, yet universal nature – are listed below.

## Ethics

From the Greek word *ethos*, meaning "morals, manner of being".

- Responsibility relates to ethics the way that accountability relates to professional conduct – although the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Responsibility is a general notion, although more demanding than jurisprudence. Accountability – more closely related to jurisprudence – has a restrictive and more practical connotation.  
Christian Saint-Germain, PhD, UQAM
- A distinct concept (versus that of morality) that refers to values rather than obligations. It therefore sets our decisions to take action against the backdrop of the values we wish to put into practice. (Our translation)  
Georges A. Legault, *Professionalisme et délibération éthique*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2006
- The philosophical analysis of human morality and conduct; system of conduct or behaviour, moral principles  
*Webster's Canadian Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 2004
- Fundamentally, ethics are the guiding principles by which people make decisions and conduct their lives. (...) Business ethics involves applying ethical principles to the activities of business and to the relationships between businesses and various stakeholders. It applies to a wide range of business activity such as relationships with suppliers, employees, and consumers as well as the overall system by which a company is directed and controlled (i.e. governance).  
Canadian Centre for Ethics & Corporate Policy

## Applied Ethics

- A context of ethics in which the situation takes precedence. Under these circumstances, ethical issues always arise in the heat of the moment, at the heart of the action, i.e. on the spot. The option to act always presents itself in complex situations – be they personal, organization-centered or social. A solution needs to be chosen, and the decision will have an impact on the individual and those around him/her, as well as the environment. The ethical question is expressed as follows: "Is this the best course of action to take under the circumstances?" (Our translation)  
Georges A. Legault, *Professionalisme et délibération éthique*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2006
- The use of moral rules or principles in actual situations.  
G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University

## Code of conduct

- A code of ethics or code of conduct is a way of communicating the purpose, values and objectives of an organization. It usually proposes specific principles and rules of conduct. A key objective of a code is to provide guidance on expected as well as rationale for that behaviour.

Canadian Centre for Ethics & Corporate Policy

## Deontology

- The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (deon) and for science (or study) of (logos). In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted. In other words, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to (aretaic [virtue] theories) that — fundamentally, at least — guide and assess what kind of person (in terms of character traits) we are and should be. And within that domain, deontologists — those who subscribe to deontological theories of morality — stand in opposition to consequentialists.

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

- Kant's theory is an example of a deontological or duty-based ethics : It judges morality by examining the nature of actions and the will of agents rather than goals achieved. (Roughly, a deontological theory looks at inputs rather than outcomes.) One reason for the shift away from consequences to duties is that, in spite of our best efforts, we cannot control the future. We are praised or blamed for actions within our control, and that includes our willing, not our achieving.

Charles D. Kay, Wofford College

## Dilemma

- State of uncertainty or perplexity especially as requiring a choice between equally unfavorable options.

WordNet, Princeton University, 2006

- A problem that occurs when a person is incapable of meeting all his or her moral obligations at one time.

G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University

- A situation where each of two alternative courses is undesirable; any difficult problem or choice.

[Webster's Canadian Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2004](#)

## Ethical code

- A system of principles governing morality and acceptable conduct.  
WordNet, Princeton University, 2006

## Morals

- Relating to character and human behaviour, particularly as regards right and wrong.  
Webster's Canadian Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2004
- Good according to a standard of right and wrong, as in: The moral thing to do isn't always the popular thing to do.  
business-words.com

## Morality

- Beliefs and practices related to the notion of right conduct or good character.  
G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University
- Goodness according to a recognized code of conduct, as in: For their leader they chose a person of the highest morality.  
business-words.com

## Principle

- A fundamental rule, law, or doctrine, from which other rules or judgments are derived.  
G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University

## Professional Ethics

- Codes of conduct established by professionals to govern ethical behavior within that profession.  
G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University

## Value

- An ideal accepted by some individual or group.  
WordNet, Princeton University, 2006
- Those ideals that a person holds dear and finds morally compelling.  
G. J. Rentschler, Duquesne University

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### Code of Ethics

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Did you know that the first code of ethics for public relations was formulated by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 1950? And that the Code of Athens, the international code of ethics for public relations practitioners, was adopted in 1965 by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA)?

In the early 1950s, various professional associations developed their own respective codes of ethics in response to concern over improving standards of conduct for public relations practitioners. These codes, which are constantly evolving, comprise a key resource for consultation. They represent a first-line repository of references that practitioners can use to guide their actions, while responding to their concerns for rigour and professionalism when fulfilling their responsibilities.

Here is a partial list of these codes:

- ↪ [Public Relations Society of America \(PRSA\)](#)
- ↪ [International Public Relations Association \(IPRA\)](#)
- ↪ [International Association of Business Communicators \(IABC\)](#)
- ↪ [Confédération européenne des relations publiques \(CERP\)](#)
- ↪ [Canadian Public Relations Society \(CPRS\)](#)
- ↪ [Société québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques \(SQPRP\)](#)

#### Research

Also available for perusal is the [Proposal for a New Framework for the Ethical and Professional Conduct of Public Relations Professionals](#), a study carried out by the Centre for Sustainable Development, Ethics and Communications.

This research, begun in 2006, was undertaken against a backdrop of increased concern with issues of ethics in public relations in the professional world, in Quebec, Canada and other countries.

Page 14 - Codes of Ethics:

[PRSA CODE OF ETHICS](#)

[IPRA CODE OF VENICE](#)

[IPRA CODE OF ATHENS](#)

[IPRA CODE OF BRUSSELS](#)

[IABC CODE OF ETHICS](#)

[CPRS CODE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS](#)

[SQPRP – CODE DE DÉONTOLOGIE](#)

Page 14 - Research:

[Proposal for a New Framework for the Ethical and Professional Conduct of Public Relations Professionals](#)

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## References

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If reference works are to be useful, they must be easily accessible. A number of sources – both publications and subject-specific websites – are available and can be used to clear up questions when deliberating on ethics-related issues.

- [Bibliography](#)
- [Useful links](#)



## Bibliography

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If it was believed that ethics had generated little writing, the bibliography proposed here testifies to a very different reality. It includes a large selection of titles providing general references on ethics and applied ethics, as well as specific publications on ethics in public relations and communications, and on ethics in organisations.

### Public Relations and Ethics: A Selected Bibliography

Page 17 - Publication:

[Public Relations and Ethics: A Selected Bibliography](#)

## Useful links

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- [Association for Practical and Professional Ethics](#)
- [BusinessEthics.ca](#)
- [Canadian Center for Ethics and Corporate Policy](#)
- [Centre de recherche en éthique de l'Université de Montréal \(CRÉUM\)](#)
- [Center for Ethics and Business](#)
- [Center for Ethics and Social Justice](#)
- [Center for Integrity in Business](#)
- [Centre for Practical Ethics](#)
- [Centre for the Study of Ethics in the Professions](#)
- [Centre interuniversitaire de recherche en éthique appliquée \(CIRÉA\)](#)
- [Cercle d'Éthique des Affaires](#)
- [Chaire de management éthique - HEC Montréal](#)
- [Chaire d'éthique appliquée](#)
- [Chaire Hoover d'éthique économique et sociale](#)
- [Clarkson Centre for Business Ethics and Board Effectiveness](#)
- [Ethical Corporation](#)
- [Ethics Resource Centre](#)
- [Institute for Business, Technology and Ethics](#)
- [Institute for Global Ethics](#)
- [Institute of Business Ethics](#)
- [Institute of Communication Ethics](#)
- [Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University](#)
- [Public Affairs Council](#)
- [Society for Business Ethics](#)
- [The Center Carol and Lawrence Zicklin for Business Ethics Research](#)
- [The W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics](#)

Page 19 - Web resources still available on the Internet:

- [Association for Practical and Professional Ethics](#)
- [BusinessEthics.ca](#)
- [Canadian Center for Ethics and Corporate Policy](#)
- [Centre de recherche en éthique](#)
- [Institute for Business Ethics and Sustainability](#)
- [York Collegium for Public Ethics](#)
- [Centre for the Study of Ethics in the Professions](#)
- [Cercle d'éthique des affaires](#)
- [Chaire de management éthique – HEC Montréal](#)
- [Chaire d'éthique appliquée](#)
- [Chaire Hoover d'éthique économique et sociale](#)
- [Clarkson Centre for Business Ethics and Board Effectiveness](#)
- [Ethics & Compliance Initiative](#)
- [Institute of Business Ethics](#)
- [Institute of Communication Ethics](#)
- [Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University](#)
- [Society for Business Ethics](#)
- [The W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics](#)

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## Decision-making Tools

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Did you know that, when faced with an ethical dilemma, it is unethical to neglect to ask yourself questions?

Communications and public relations have, to a large extent, become more complex over the past few years, which, in and of itself, reveals a welter of ethical issues that warrant reflection. Ethics can come into play in two forms, however: as major issues and also as ethical dilemmas that professionals must resolve on a day-to-day basis. The dilemma occurs when a conflict arises between two possible – yet contradictory – choices of actions. In such a case, all of the relevant questions need to be asked and a number of factors taken into consideration when thinking the matter through, which will lead to the best possible decision for that particular set of circumstances.

Several decision making tools exist - here are two examples:

- ↪ [PRSA decision-making tool](#)
- ↪ [The Sims Model](#)

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### PRSA Decision-making Tool

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PRSA offers public relations professionals faced with ethical dilemmas the following tool to assist in the decision-making process :

#### Approach

1. Define the specific ethical issue/conflict.
2. Identify internal/external factors (e.g., legal, influence the decision.
3. Identify key values.
4. Identify the parties who will be affected by relations professional's obligation to each.
5. Select ethical principles to guide the decision-
6. Make a decision and justify it.

#### Working Examples

The following case studies present various situations in which ethical dilemmas have arisen. The solutions presented in the examples are not applicable to every type of situation, but rather should inform your thinking when encounter such dilemmas. The Centre thanks PRSA for its much-appreciated contribution to this section.

- ↪ [Case Study #1 Free Flow of Information and Discussion Key](#)
- ↪ [Case Study #2 Competition and Discussion Key](#)
- ↪ [Case Study #3 Disclosure of Information and Discussion Key](#)
- ↪ [Case Study #4 Safeguarding Confidences and Discussion Key](#)
- ↪ [Case Study #5 Conflicts of Interest and Discussion Key](#)
- ↪ [Case Study #6 Enhancing the Profession and Discussion Key](#)

Page 22:

These working examples are no longer available here, but some scenarios are outlined in the [PRSA Code Provisions of Conduct](#).

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*Outside the 2010-2011 period:*

Note. Examples of solutions providing guidance related to specific issues can also be found on the PRSA website in 2022, through an [Ethical Standards Advisory](#), created in 2021.

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### The Sims Model

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#### Approach

The Sims Model, a decision-making tool developed in 1992 by Ronald R. Sims, is an approach intended to build a company's awareness of its responsibilities with respect to promoting its employees' ethical consciousness. The scope of this approach extends beyond the simple implementation of a code of ethics within a company: its aim is to create a corporate culture that fosters reflection as a matter of course when employees are faced with a issue of an ethical nature.

Underlying this approach is the principle that a healthy corporate culture will have a positive influence on a company's overall well-being. The manner in which a company's top-level executives and managers conduct themselves and promote a sound ethical climate will impact their employees and how they behave when faced with ethical issues. Every member of an organization should share a common vision of what represents good and bad behaviour.

Three broad principles serve as the underpinnings of this model, to ensure that every member of the organization develops an ethical consciousness:

- A. Chief executives should encourage ethical consciousness in their organizations by showing their support and concern about ethical practices.
- B. Formal processes should be implemented to support and reinforce ethical behaviour.
- C. The philosophies of top and middle managers should focus on the institutionalization of ethical norms and practices that are incorporated into all organizational levels.



## Steps

Sims presents a seven-step checklist of questions that every employee should ask him/herself when faced with an ethical dilemma.

- (1) Recognize and clarify the dilemma.
- (2) Get all the possible facts.
- (3) List your options - all of them.
- (4) Test each option by asking: "Is it legal? Is it right? Is it beneficial?"
- (5) Make your decision.
- (6) Double check your decision by asking: "How would I feel if my family found out about this? How would I feel if my decision was printed in the local newspaper?"
- (7) Take action.

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## Biographical Details

Ronald R. Sims is Senior Professor at the Graduate School of Business, College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, USA. He has authored the following publications:

- Human Resources Management: Contemporary Issues, Challenges and Opportunities, IAP (2007)
- Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility: Why Giants Fall, Greenwood Publishing Group (2003).
- Changing the Way We Manage Change, Greenwood Publishing Group (2002).
- Teaching Business Ethics for Effective Learning, Greenwood Publishing Group (2002).

## Sources

<http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/>  
<http://construct.haifa.ac.il/~danielp/soc/Sims.htm>

\* Reproduced with the kind permission of Ronald R. Sims.

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## Redress and Disciplinary Measures

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A variety of resources, documentation, codes of ethics and decision making tools have been made available to public relations professionals to help build their awareness of ethical issues and guide them as they work to resolve these problems on their own. They may, however, wish to take their approach further in some cases – a process that would involve consultation with ethics experts or filing a complaint with the appropriate organization that has jurisdiction.

### International Ethics Committee

Global Alliance has set up an international ethics committee to examine the issues surrounding public relations practice and communications management.

### Disciplinary Action

Professional associations follow different approaches when establishing procedures for dealing with any breach of principles and rules governing professional conduct. Here are some examples:

## ➤ **Penalty – Code of Athens – IPRA**

The Code of Athens, the international code of ethics for public relations practitioners with which all members of the **International Public Relations Association** are required to comply, stipulates that any infringement that has been demonstrated by specific evidence is deemed to be serious misconduct that will result in an appropriate penalty.

## ➤ **Termination Procedures – IABC**

One article of the **IABC Code of Ethics** states that "members of IABC who are found guilty by an appropriate governmental agency or judicial body of violating laws and public policies governing their professional activities may have their membership terminated by the IABC executive board following procedures set forth in the association's bylaws."

## ➤ **Complaint Procedure – CPRS**

The Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) has set up an **Ethics Committee** that has authority to ensure compliance with the principles and articles set out in the Code, as stipulated in the CPRS regulations. Starting in 2005, CPRS member chapters have been invited to set up an ethics committee for the purpose of ensuring management of complaints at the local level.

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