

Claim 1 Deal with Ethical Issues

I started my consultancy company 7 years ago. My expertise is reservoir/petroleum engineering and my work involves trouble shooting, resource assessment, asset valuation and development strategy. The reports I present often have large financial implications and therefore any issues arising from stakeholders have to be managed. As a sole consultancy, ethical issues frequently surface and the challenge is to avoid dilemmas before they appear.

When working in isolation, it is essential to continually revise and update ethical issues pertaining to the industry. Excellent places to seek this information are with the industry associations such as the Society of Petroleum Engineers' [SPE] Guide to Professional Conduct and Engineers Australia's Code of Ethics. The SPE ethic committee has Power Points which show actual ethical dilemmas which are not always clear cut. The SPE Ethics committee outlines the need to consult your peers on the correct way forward through ethical dilemmas. Mentors are required by the individual consultant to discuss ethical dilemmas. I fortunately have two well respected industry leaders to advise on ethical issues. They have extensive experience and understand the requirement that discussions have to be in general terms to maintain confidentiality.

The following examples are ethical issues which I have experienced as an independent petroleum consultant. A financial investment company was endeavouring to understand the investment potential of a gas company. They were seeking the possibility of gaining an advantage which could be interpreted as "inside information". Without seeking legal interpretations on this request, my gut feeling was that I did not want to work with this company.

Conflict of Interest often arises when working with many companies. The solution generally involves transparency. For example, on behalf of Company A, I conducted a resource asset review on Company B. One month after completing the project, Company B requested I run a course for their technical staff. The solution was to contact Company A and ask if they had any objections.

Once, as a consultant, I introduced two of my clients for possible joint venture discussions. In this scenario transparency was essential and my role was documented and understood by both parties.

Ethical issues are often not obvious. In these cases it is essential for the individual contractor to have a mentor with an independent view point to discuss options. For example, a client misused my report in a public arena. My mentor advised that my reputation in the industry can easily withstand this incident but if I remain with the client and it occurs again the market would be less forgiving. Cessation with the company proved to be the best course of action. This process involved written letters to the client explaining the reasons why my firm could no longer continue to provide its service. Negotiations were cordial and professional and all legal obligations met. With the current work environment and regulatory complexities, it is essential for an engineer working alone to continually revise the code of ethics established by industry institutions [Engineers Australia and Society of Petroleum Engineers].