



**JEPPIAAR INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

“Self-Belief | Self Discipline | Self Respect”



**DEPARTMENT  
OF  
COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING**

**LECTURE NOTES**

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### UNIT III

#### ENGINEERING AS SOCIAL EXPERIMENTATION

Engineering as Experimentation – Engineers as responsible Experimenters – Codes of Ethics – A Balanced Outlook on Law.

#### 3.1 Engineering as Experimentation

Experimentation plays an important role in the process of designing the product. When it is decided to change a new engineering concept into its first rough design, preliminary tests or simulation should be conducted. Using formal experimental methods, the materials and methods of designing are tried out. These tests may be based on more detailed designs. The test for designing should be evolved till the final product produced. With the help of feedback of several tests, further modification can be made if necessary. Beyond these tests and experiments, each engineering project has to be viewed as an experiment.

#### Similarities to Standard Experiments

There are so many aspects, which are of virtual for combining every type of engineering works to make it suitable to look at engineering projects as experiments. The main three important aspects are:

1) Any engineering project or plan is put into practice with partial ignorance because while designing a model there are several uncertainties occurred. The reason to the fact that engineers don't have all the needed facts available well in advance before starting the project. At some point, both the theoretical examining and the laboratory testing must be by- passed for the sake of completing the project. Really, the success of an engineer is based on the his talent which is exactly being the ability to succeed in achieving jobs with only a partial knowledge of scientific laws about the nature and society.

2) The final outcomes of engineering projects are generally uncertain like that of experiments what we do.

In engineering, in most of the cases, the possible outcomes may not be known and even small and mild projects itself involve greater risks.

The following uncertainties occur in the model designs

1. Model used for the design calculations
2. Exact characteristics of the material purchased.
3. Constancies of materials used for processing and fabrication.
4. About the nature of the pressure the finished product will encounter.

For instance, a reservoir may cause damage to the surroundings and affect the ecosystem. If it leaks or breaks, the purpose will not be served. A special purpose fingerprint reader may find its application in the identification and close observation on the disagreeing persons with the government. A nuclear reactor may cause unexpected problems to the surrounding population leading to a great loss to the owners. A hair dryer may give damage to the unknowing or wrong users from asbestos insulation from its barrel.

3) Good and effective engineering depends upon the knowledge possessed about the products at the initial and end stages.

This knowledge is very useful for increasing the effectiveness of the current products as well as for producing better products in future. This can be achieved by keenly observing on the engineering jobs by the way of experimentation. This monitoring is done by making periodic observations and tests by looking at for the successful performance and the sideeffects of the jobs. The tests of the product's efficiency, safety, cost-effectiveness, environmental impact and its value that depends upon the utility to the society should also be monitored. It also extends to the stage of client use.

### **Learning from the past**

It has been expected that the engineers have to learn not only from their own design and the production system but also the results of others. Due to lack of communication, prejudiced in not asking for clarification, fear of law and also mere negligence, these things can happen to the continuation of past mistakes. The following are some of the examples:

1. The tragedy of 'Titanic' happened because of the sufficient number of life boats. The same disaster took place in the steamship "the Arctic" some years before, because of the same problem.

2. The fall down of "the Sunshine Skyline Bridge" in the bay of Thamba at Sweden in 1980, on a moving ship due to improper matching of horizontal impact forces in mind. This could have been avoided if the engineers had known about the striking of the ships with the Maracaibo Bridge at Venezuela in 1964 and the Tasman Bridge of Australia in 1975.

3. The nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island on March 1979, was due to malfunctioning of the valves. Valves though minute items, are being among the least reliable components of hydraulic systems. It was a pressure relief valve and lack of information about its opening or closing state contributed to a nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island. This malfunction was already happened because of the same reasons at other locations.

4. The disaster of Tettron Dam in Los Angeles was due to rapid flow of water and sudden break down. The builder didn't consider the case of the Fontenelle Dam, which was also collapsed due to the same problem. So, to say that engineers should not fully depend on handbooks and they should have some review of the past cases relating to their current task.

### **Comparisons with standard Experiments**

Engineering is entirely different from standard experiments in few aspects. Those differences are very much helpful to find out the special responsibilities of engineers and also help them in knowing about the moral irresponsibilities which are involved in engineering.

#### **1. Experimental Control**

Members for two groups should be selected in a standard experimental control, i.e Group A and Group B. The members of the group 'A' should be given

the special experimental treatment. The group 'B' do not receive the same though they are in the same environment. This group is called the '*control group*'

Though it is not possible in engineering but for the projects which are confirmed to laboratory experiments. Because, in engineering the experimental subjects are human beings who are out of the control of the experimenters. In engineering, the consumers have more control as they are the selecting authority of a project. So in engineering it is impossible to follow a random selection. An engineer has to work only with the past data available with various groups who use the products. So engineering can be viewed as a natural experiment which uses human subjects. But today, most of the engineers do not care for the above said Experimental Control.

## **2. Informed Consent**

Engineering is closely related to the medical testing of new drugs and techniques on human beings as it also concerned with human beings.

When new medicines have been tested, it should be informed to the persons who undergo the test. They have moral and legal rights to know about the fact which is based on "**informed consent**" before take part in the experiment. Engineering must also recognize these rights. When a producer sells a new product to a firm which has its own engineering staff, generally there will be an agreement regarding the risks and benefits form that testing.

Informed consent has two main principles such as knowledge and voluntariness.

First, the persons who are put under the experiment has to be given all the needed information to make an appropriate decision. Second, they must enter into the experiment without any force, fraud and deception. The experimenter has also to consider the fundamental rights of the minorities and the compensation for the harmful effects of that experiment.

In both medicine and engineering there may be a large gap between the experimenter and his knowledge on the difficulties of an experiment. This gap can be filled only when it is possible to give all the relevant information needed for drawing a responsible decision on whether to participate in the experiment or not.

In medicine, before prescribing a medicine to the patient, a responsible physician must search for relevant information on the side effects of the drug. The hospital management must allow him to undergo different treatments to different patients and finally the patient must be ready to receive that information from the physician. Similarly it is possible for an engineer to give relevant information about a product only when there is a better co-operation by the management and quick acceptance from the customers.

### **Essential conditions are for a valid informed consent**

- a. The consent must be given voluntarily and not by any force.
- b. The consent must be based on the relevant information needed by a rational person and should be presented in a clear and easily understandable form.
- c. The consenter must be capable of processing the information and to make rational decisions in a quick manner.

- d. The information needed by a rational person must be stated in a form to understand without any difficulty and has to be spread widely.
- e. The experimenter's consent has to be offered in absentia of the experimenter by a group which represents many experiments.

### **Knowledge Gained**

Scientific experiments have been conducted to acquire new knowledge. Whereas engineering projects are conducted as experiments not for getting new knowledge. Suppose the outcomes of the experiment is best, it tells us nothing new, but merely affirms that we are right about something. Mean while, the unexpected outcomes put us search for new knowledge.

### **3.2 Engineers as responsible Experimenters**

The engineers have so many responsibilities for serving the society.

1. A primary duty is to protect the safety of human beings and respect their right of consent. [A conscientious commitment to live by moral values].
2. Having a clear awareness of the experimental nature of any project, thoughtful forecasting of its possible side effects, and an effort to monitor them reasonably. [A comprehensive perspective or relative information].
3. Unrestricted free personal involvement in all the steps of a project. [Autonomy]
4. Being accountable for the results of a project [Accountability]
5. Exhibiting their technical competence and other characteristics of professionalism.

### **Conscientiousness**

Conscientiousness implies consciousness (sense of awareness). As holding the responsible profession with maintaining full range moral ethics and values which are relevant to the situation. In order to understand the given situation, its implications, knowhow, person who is involved or affected, Engineers should have open eyes, open ears and open mind.

The present working environment of engineers, narrow down their moral vision fully with the obligations accompanied with the status of the employee. More number of engineers are only salaried employees, so, they have to work within large bureaucracies under great pressure to work smoothly within the company. They have to give importance only to the obligations of their employers. Gradually, the small negative duties such as not altering data by fraud, not violating patent right and not breaking confidentiality, may be viewed as the full extent of moral desire.

As mentioned, engineering as social experimentation brings into light not only to the person concerned but also to the public engineers as guardians of the public interest i.e., to safeguard the welfare and safety of those affected by the engineering projects. This view helps to ensure that this safety and welfare will not be affected by the search for new knowledge, the hurry to get profits, a small and narrow follow up of rules or a concern over benefits for the many and ignoring the harm to the few.

The social experimentation that involved in engineering should be restricted by the Participants consent.

### **Relevant Information**

Without relevant factual information, conscientious is not possible. For showing moral concern there should be an obligation to obtain and assess properly all the available information related to the fulfillment of one's moral obligations.

This can be explained as:

1) To understand and grasp the circumstance of a person's work, it is necessary to know about how that work has a moral importance. For example, A person is trying to design a good heat exchanger. There is nothing wrong in that. But at the same time, if he forgets the fact that the heat exchanger will be used in the manufacture of an illegal product, then he is said to be showing a lack of moral concern. So a person must be aware of the wider implication of his work that makes participation in a project.

2) Blurring the circumstance of a person's work derived from his specialization and division of labour is to put the responsibilities on someone else in the organization. For example if a company produces items which are out of fashion or the items which promotes unnecessary energy wastage, then it is easy to blame sales department.

The above said means, neglecting the importance of a person's works also makes it difficult in acquiring a full perspective along a second feature of factual information i.e., consequence of what one does.

So, while giving regard to engineering as social experimentation, points out the importance of circumstances of a work and also encourage the engineers to view his specialized activities in a project as a part of a large social impact.

### **3.3 Codes of Ethics**

The codes of ethics have to be adopted by engineering societies as well as by engineers. These codes exhibit the rights, duties, and obligations of the members of a profession. Codes are the set of laws and standards.

A code of ethics provides a framework for ethical judgment for a professional. A code cannot be said as totally comprehensive and cover all ethical situations that an engineer has to face. It serves only as a starting point for ethical decision-making. A code expresses the circumstances to ethical conduct shared by the members of a profession. It is also to be noted that ethical codes do not establish the new ethical principles. They repeat only the principles and standards that are already accepted as responsible engineering practice. A code defines the roles and responsibilities of professionals.

#### **Roles of codes and its functions**

##### **1. Inspiration and Guidance**

Codes give a convinced motivation for ethical conduct and provide a helpful guidance for achieving the obligations of engineers in their work. Codes contribute mostly general guidance as they have to be brief. Specific directions may also be

given to apply the code in morally good ways. The following engineering societies have published codes of ethics.

AAES - American Association of Engineering Societies

ABET - Accreditation Board for Engineering and  
Technology (USA) NSPE - National Society of  
Professional Engineer (USA)

IEEE - Institute of Electrical and Electronics  
Engineering (USA) AICTE - All India Council for  
Technical Education (India)

Most of the technological companies have established their own codes such as pentagon (USA), Microsoft etc. These codes are very much helpful to strengthen the moral issues on the work of an engineer.

## **2. Support**

Codes always support an engineer who follows the ethical principles. Codes give engineers a positive, a possible good support for standing on moral issues. Codes also serve as a legal support for engineers.

## **3. Deterrence and Discipline**

Codes act as a deterrent because they never encourage to act immorally. They also provide discipline among the Engineers to act morally on the basis of codes does not overrule the rights of those being investigated.

## **4. Education and Mutual Understanding**

Codes have to be circulated and approved officially by the professionals, the public and government organizations which concern with the moral responsibilities of engineers and organizations.

## **5. Contributing to the profession's Public Image**

Codes help to create a good image to the public of an ethically committed profession. It helps the engineers in an effective manner to serve the public. They also gives self- regulation for the profession itself.

## **6. Protecting the Status Quo**

Codes determine ethical conventions which help to create an agreed upon minimum level of ethical conduct. But they can also suppress the disagreement within the profession.

## **7. Promoting Business Interests**

Codes help to improve the business interests. They help to moralize the business dealings to benefit those within the profession.

## **Limitations of Codes**

1. Codes are restricted to general and vague wordings. Due to this limitation they cannot be applicable to all situations directly. It is also impossible to analyze fully and predict the full range of moral problems that arises in a complex profession.
2. Engineering codes often have internal conflicts. So they can't give a solution or method for resolving the conflict.

3. They cannot be treated as the final moral authority for any professional conduct. Codes represent a compromise between differing judgments and also developed among heated committee disagreements.
4. Only a few practicing engineers are the members of Professional Societies and so they can not be compelled to abide by their codes.
5. Many engineers who are the members of Professional Societies are not aware of the existence of the codes of their societies and they never go through it.
6. Codes can be reproduced in a very rapid manner.
7. Codes are said to be coercive i.e., implemented by threat or force.

### **3.4 A Balanced Outlook on Law**

A balanced outlook on laws stresses the necessity of laws and regulations and their limitations in directing engineering practice.

In order to live, work and play together in harmony as a society, there must be a balance between individual needs and desires against collective needs and desires. Only ethical conduct can provide such a balance. This ethical conduct can be applied only with the help of laws. Laws are important as the people are not fully responsible and because of the competitive nature of the free enterprise system which does not encourage moral initiative.

The model of engineering as social experimentation allows for the importance of clear laws to be effectively enforced.

Engineers ought to play an effective role in promoting or changing enforceable rules of engineering as well as in enforcing them. So the codes must be enforced with the help of laws. The following are the two best examples.

#### **1. Babylon's Building Code: (1758 B.C.)**

This code was made by Hammurabi, king of Babylon. He formed a code for builders of his time and all the builders were forced to follow the code by law. He ordered

“If a builder has built a house for a man and has not made his work sound, and the house which he has built was fallen down and so caused the death of the householder, that builder shall be put to death. If it causes the death of the householder's son, they shall put that builder's son to death. If it causes the death of the householder's slave, he shall give slave to the householder. If it destroys property he shall replace anything it has destroyed; and because he has not made the house sound which he has built and it has fallen down, he shall rebuild the house which has fallen down from his own property. If a builder has built a house for a man and does not make his work perfect and the wall bulges, that builder shall put that wall in to sound condition at his own cost”.

The above portion of Babylon's building code was respected duly. But the aspects find only little approval today. This code gives a powerful incentive for self regulation.



**2. The United States Steamboat Code: [1852 A.D]**

Steam engines in the past were very large and heavy. James Watt, Oliver Evans and Richard Trevethik modified the old steam engines by removing condensers and made them compact. Beyond careful calculations and guidelines, explosions of boiler happened on steam boats, because of the high speed of the boats. The safety valves were unable to keep steam pressure up causing explosion. During that period in 18th century, more than 2500 people were killed and 2000 people were injured because of the explosion of boilers in steam boats.

Due to this, the ruling congress in USA passed a law which provided for inspection of the safety aspects of ships and their boilers and engines. But his law turned out to be ineffective due to the corruptions of the inspectors and also their inadequate training regarding the safety checking. Then Alfred Guthiro, an engineer of Illinois had inspected about 200 steam boats on his own cost and found out the reasons for the boiler explosions and made a report. His recommendations were published by a Senator Shields of Illinois and incorporated in senate documents. With the help of this, another law was passed. Now it is in the hands of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers who formulated the standards for producing steam boats.