



M A R Y B E T H W E S T

The State of Ethics Codes in the Public Relations Industry:

# *A Global Analysis*

#PRethics

Elevating Industry Standards ... Building Cross-Cultural Consensus

PR Ethics Month – September 2023

*Preface by Mary Beth West, APR, FPRCA, with code analysis reporting and recommendations provided by the Institute of Business Ethics (London, U.K.)*

# Preface

by Mary Beth West, APR, FPRCA

**Published ethics codes serve a critical role for any industry – particularly those such as public relations (PR) that are widely unregulated by governmental entities.**



In general, codes of ethics (sometimes referred to as “codes of conduct,” “professional standards,” “charters,” or other terms) provide some measure of universal guidance and guardrails to inform the values of honest work in a professional or technical field.

Some go further to lend definitive rulemaking about the Do’s and Don’ts of everyday behaviors, decision-making, and judgment calls for those who compose an industry’s workforce.

They also inform and educate students who are rising through programs of academic / university study and other training, about performance expectations they should expect to encounter and deliver in their career workplace.

**In practical terms, ethics codes set a bar for the acceptable compliance norms within shared industry standards.**

Codes of ethics often provide basic tests of scrutiny that inform or even help measure whether a policy, practice, or behavior can be trusted – and therefore valued consistently – by diverse internal and external stakeholders.

Codes also usually strive for best practice, versus lowest common denominators, i.e., a litmus test of “What does it take to get fired around here?”

Yet with all of this shared understanding about what ethics codes can and should be, in the public relations industry, the question looms large:

How effectively are global PR association ethics codes meeting the needs of today’s PR practitioners, leaders, agencies, clients, and in-house teams, in understanding and complying with strong standards of communicating, managing information, and advancing reputations, in ways that merit public trust?

## Introduction

As the global public relations sector observes its annual PR Ethics Month (#PREthics) in September 2023, this report aims to provide an objective, aggregate overview of how well the PR industry’s most prominent ethics codes currently serve today’s global industry of professional communicators.

This report includes an independent analysis of published ethics codes among 24 PR industry associations worldwide, conducted in spring 2022 by the London-based Institute of Business Ethics (a not-for-profit organization), in coordination with the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) Global Ethics Council.

Communication leaders, strategists, practitioners, and PR firms composing the memberships of these 24 independent PR member associations work around the globe, within all levels of government, corporate, consulting, and not-for-profit sectors.

Their work drives not only how businesses, organizations, and governmental entities communicate but also how brand relationships, reputation, and trust are managed to meet leadership goals, while also balancing the public’s own expectations for acceptable conduct, performance, and transparency.

The purpose of this research project in partnership with the IBE was to identify – based on pre-established criteria by the PRCA Global Ethics Council and the IBE – points of differentiation and points of parity of ethics codes across a wide breadth of PR industry associations representing diverse nations and cultures.

With the IBE’s independent assessment, the ultimate aim was to identify areas of potential improvement and advancement of ethics codes, across the global community of PR associations – in service to raising PR industry ethical standards worldwide, core to the PRCA Global Ethics Council’s remit, established in 2020.

# Methodology

As stated in the IBE's report, "an initial agreement between PRCA and the IBE was reached in relation to an initial set of international associations to be analyzed and the basic parameters of a standardized instrument.... The initial list of parameters provided by PRCA was enhanced by the IBE and the final parameters of the standardized instrument can be found in (this report). The following methodology was employed to reach the expected targets of this report:

- 1 "For each association, an online search using Google was performed.
- 2 "Once the association's webpage was found, the ease of locating the code of ethics was assessed.
- 3 "If the code of ethics could not be located within the association's webpage, another Google search was performed with the parameters 'name of association code of ethics'.
- 4 "If no code could be located, these were replaced by other associations in agreement with PRCA.
- 5 "Websites that use non-English native languages were translated using the automated Google translate service from the browser. The code of ethics was then translated using either Google Translate or Microsoft Word translation services. These seemed to be of an adequate standard, producing comprehensible outputs.
- 6 "All documents related to the code of ethics that could be located on the associations' websites were listed.
- 7 "Documents were assessed in relation to forty-nine different criteria...
- 8 "To ensure reliability, an inter-rater reliability test was carried out. This was done by comparing

the results from two researchers on five associations. The result of this test produced a high similarity level in the analysis.

9 "Following the initial assessment, as per step 7, the data was investigated per criterion, grouping together related criteria in order to produce a first draft of this report..."

In response to the IBE's analysis and recommendations in June 2022, the then-Director General of the PRCA, the late Francis Ingham, suggested the PRCA should consider revising its own Professional Charter / code. A later decision was made upon announcement in October 2022 of a PRCA governance review to postpone the PRCA's release of the IBE report, which previously had been planned, until after the PRCA announced its new governance roadmap (which took place in May 2023). A follow-on decision was made to release the report in line with the industry's next annual Ethics Month.

More granular assessment data is available for private association-management review, specific to the IBE's independent code evaluation for all 24 PR associations noted in this report – including the IBE's specific recommendations for potential expansion or enhancement of each association's code, in keeping with pre-identified best practice criteria.

*Please note that the IBE's independent evaluation of any PR association's published ethics code is not intended as either an endorsement or admonishment of the organization itself, in any manner or context.*

This report seeks to serve all PR associations that might opt to revisit their codes and consider timely updates, revisions, and other suggested enhancements, so that all associations can serve their respective memberships better, as well as the overall industry.

All assessments are in relation to comparisons against the IBE's pre-determined criteria, applied equally by IBE subject-matter experts in reviewing each of the 24 codes assessed.

## PR Associations in the IBE's Code Analysis Included:

Organization Name	Abbr. as displayed in this report	Website
Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), Canada, North America	CPRS	<a href="https://www.cprs.ca/">https://www.cprs.ca/</a>
Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), UK Europe	CIPR	<a href="https://www.cipr.co.uk/">https://www.cipr.co.uk/</a>
Communication & Enterprise, France, Europe *	COM-ENT	<a href="https://www.com-ent.fr/">https://www.com-ent.fr/</a>
Consejo Profesional del Relaciones Publicas de la República Argentina (CPRPA) Argentina, Latin America *	CPRPA	<a href="https://rpp.org.ar/">https://rpp.org.ar/</a>
Croatian Public Relations Association (CPRA) Croatia, Europe *	CPRA	<a href="https://www.huoj.hr/">https://www.huoj.hr/</a>
Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) Singapore, Asia	IPRS	<a href="https://www.iprs.org.sg/">https://www.iprs.org.sg/</a>
Korea Public Relations Consultancy Association (KPRCA)	KPRCA	<a href="http://kprca.or.kr/en/kprca_kprca/">http://kprca.or.kr/en/kprca_kprca/</a>
Norwegian Communication Association (NCA), Norway, Europe *	NCA	<a href="https://www.kommunikasjon.no/">https://www.kommunikasjon.no/</a>
Polish Public Relations Association (PSPR) Poland, Europe *	PSPR	<a href="https://polskipr.pl/">https://polskipr.pl/</a>
PR Council, New York (USA)	PR Council	<a href="https://prcouncil.net/">https://prcouncil.net/</a>
Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA), UK/Mena/APAC/Americas	PRCA	<a href="https://www.prca.org.uk/">https://www.prca.org.uk/</a>
Public Relations Association of Indonesia (PERHUMAS) Indonesia, Asia *	PERHUMAS	<a href="http://www.perhumas.or.id/">http://www.perhumas.or.id/</a>
Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), Australia, Oceania	PRIA	<a href="https://www.pria.com.au/">https://www.pria.com.au/</a>
Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) Ireland, Europe	PRII	<a href="https://www.prii.ie/">https://www.prii.ie/</a>
Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), New Zealand, Oceania	PRINZ	<a href="https://prinznz.org.nz/">https://prinznz.org.nz/</a>
Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), South Africa, Africa	PRISA	<a href="https://www.prisa.co.za/">https://www.prisa.co.za/</a>
Public Relations Society of the Philippines (PRSP), Philippines	PRSP	<a href="https://prsp.ph/">https://prsp.ph/</a>
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), US, North America	PRSA	<a href="https://www.prsa.org/home">https://www.prsa.org/home</a>
Public Relations Society of Japan (PRSJ)	PRSJ	<a href="https://prs.or.jp/en/">https://prs.or.jp/en/</a>
ABRACOM (Brazil) *	ABRACOM	<a href="https://abracom.org.br/">https://abracom.org.br/</a>
Public Relations Consultants Association of India (PRCAI) India	PRCAI	<a href="https://prcai.org/">https://prcai.org/</a>
PR Hong Kong (PRHK) Hong Kong	PRHK	<a href="https://www.prhongkong.org/">https://www.prhongkong.org/</a>
Global Alliance (GA)	GA	<a href="https://www.globalalliancepr.org/">https://www.globalalliancepr.org/</a>
International Public Relations Association (IPRA)	IPRA	<a href="https://www.ipra.org/">https://www.ipra.org/</a>

# List of Evaluation Criteria

Website	Key principles / tenets / values (listing)	Fairness to competitors and/ or colleagues' provision	Managing / ensuring data integrity provision
Initial notes	Decision making framework	Social / digital media integrity provision	Managing AI purposes and intent provision
Existence of a publicly posted, written ethics code (Y/N)	Agreement / Compliance with code as stated condition of membership	Disclosure of clients / interests represented provision	Balancing public wellbeing and third party rights provision
Link to code	Enforced code or unenforced	Conflict of interest provision'	Other provisions / content
Title	If enforced by whom and how	Fair treatment of whistleblowers provision	Regular review and certification
Approach (What approach / structure is used? Is it clear and easy to navigate?)	If unenforced, state rationale)	Internal speak-up mechanism	Glossary and index
Approach – Introduction	'Honesty' requirement?	Anti-retaliation provision	Nature, language, tone and length
Approach – Body	'Informational accuracy / anti-disinformation' provision	Diversity / anti-Discrimination provision	Design, user friendliness and comprehension aids
Approach – Conclusion	Requirement to correct information publicly issued that is later deemed incorrect	Paid media disclosure provision	Speak up
Scope	Gifts / Payments to news Media provision	Timeliness / responsiveness provision	Leadership
Year of last update given?		Managing confidences / confidential information provision	ESG
Governed / managed by			Overall Score
Leadership Introduction			Length
Manager's role			
Ethics is a shared responsibility			

## Structure of the Analysis

While it is encouraging to note that the 24 PR associations included in this report each have its own organizational code of ethics for consideration and application by their respective sets of members, at an aggregate level, the global industry **is widely found to be in need of updates and enhanced provisions** to these ethics codes across any number of standard criteria, as evaluated independently by the IBE.

As stated verbatim in its report, the IBE applied these five thematic headings to its analysis of PR industry codes:

1. "The first theme is 'Solid Foundations', which examines the ease of locating the codes of ethics, provides an indication of the length of the codes, illustrates the different naming conventions, describes the structure of the documents and outlines the approaches to regular updates.

2. "The second theme is 'User Friendliness', which focuses on factors that affect user experience. It analyzes the codes in terms of their practical usefulness and how comfortable a user would be in consulting them when they need to make a decision. ... These include decision-making aids, declarations of values and visual design elements, amongst others.

3. "The 'Leadership Role' within PR associations is the third theme. This role is different from that in commercial firms, but the words and actions of associations' leadership are significant.

4. "The fourth theme is perhaps the most important one and relates to 'Content'. This is subdivided in two sections: tone of voice and provisions. Tone of voice highlights how associations fare in terms of employing positive, inclusive, and non-threatening language. Content, on the other hand, focuses on the provisions that are covered in the codes of ethics of PR associations. The provisions section is subdivided into an analysis of the initial provisions as set out in advance between PRCA and the IBE, and an analysis of other provisions that were found to feature.

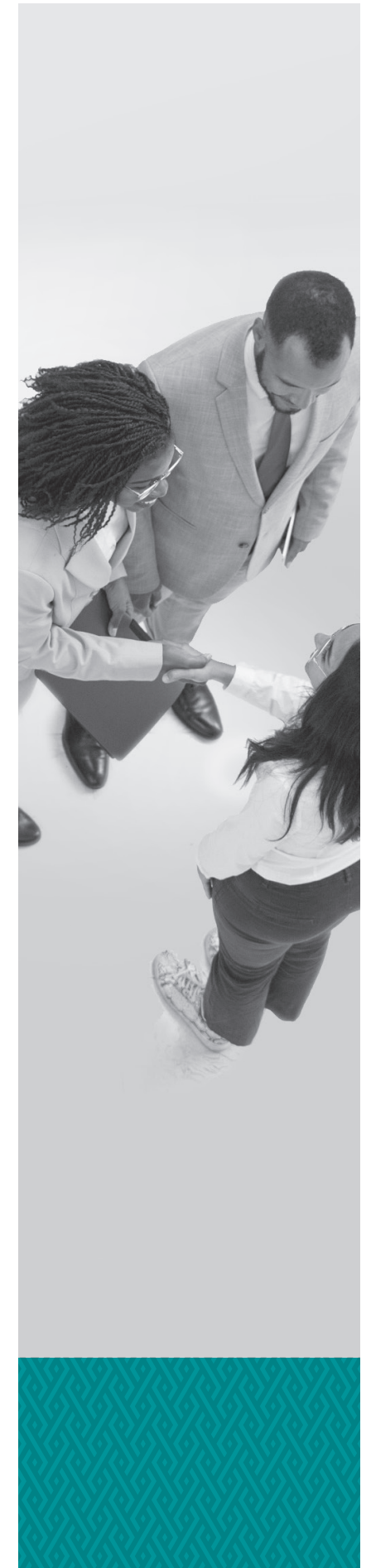
5. "The fifth theme goes on to explore 'Enforcement of the Codes'. It analyzes whether codes are a requirement for membership, whether they are enforced and, if enforced, what mechanisms are believed to be in place."

The IBE's combined analysis and resulting recommendations can serve the global PR industry in many productive ways – particularly if PR industry leaderships will embrace the role of high-quality, published ethics codes as fundamental toward advancing best-practice and helping self-regulate for ethical compliance by member practitioners.

To that end, the focus of this report is to help all PR associations worldwide advance, improve and expand their development and promotion of ethical standards and compliance.

With that focus, PR industry leaders and practitioners can emerge more knowledgeable, capable, and confident in their own ethical footing as they make decisions in collaboration with clients, employers, and other colleagues, both strategically upstream (boardrooms, c-suites) and tactically downstream (communications teams and front-line staff), relative to how and why important communication and reputation-management choices are made on any given day.

Helping raise global standards was jointly envisioned by the PRCA Global Ethics Council (as per its original remit in 2020), as well as by the study's sponsor and the IBE's research team in designing this analysis and developing the final report.





# Critical Role of PR Associations

This report's narrative discusses a variety of ethics challenges that the PR association world has addressed in the past, is currently addressing, and should consider addressing soon.

Wherever they are based, and whatever their geographic footprint, PR associations' service to the industry must engage high-quality ethical practice as a fundamental pillar.

A healthy and successful PR member-association sector serves the good of the industry. However, associations cannot accomplish this aim, without strong ethics permeating how associations operate and what they require of

members' own professional practices.

While some PR industry practitioners may question the value or relevance of PR industry associations at-large, this author strongly advocates for a global community of associations serving the industry well – inclusive of communications teams large and small and all other practitioners regardless of geographic location, experience level, practice specialization, or any other aspect.

The PR industry roundly needs the support of competent and credible association leaders lending voice effectively to advocate for the highest standards with clarity, insight, and follow-through... not only in words but also in deeds that stand rigorous tests of scrutiny.

## Underpinnings of PR Ethics

To help set the stage for this analysis and why it matters, evidence-based ethics in PR and strategic communication are fundamental in driving long-term organizational success.

The reason: PR and communications ethics help businesses, organizations, and governmental entities achieve essential – even existential – stakeholder outcomes such as high-quality 1) information exchange, 2) brand trust and 3) reputational excellence.

Conversely, a consistent lack or failure of PR and communications ethics generates reverse-outcomes, such as low-quality information exchange, brand distrust, and reputational dysfunction and crisis /

disaster – all of which can occur either in a linear manner over time or in a sudden, chaotic fashion. In large part, the global PR member-association world has worked diligently for many decades not only to advocate for the industry's highest-and-best use as a force for organizational and societal good, but also to promote within their own PR workforces the knowledge, skills, and professional values inherent to effective and honorable work.

However, many PR association ethics codes were originally developed many years – even decades – ago, reflecting more traditional constructs of PR's functionality, as further reflective of traditional media in the pre-digital era.

What historically existed many decades ago as traditional PR ethics considerations – primarily hinged on working with news media – have now evolved and expanded to far more diverse, robust, and demanding considerations for today's professional communicator. "PR" being synonymous with "media relations" (news releases, press conferences, media interviews, and like activities) was always far too limiting and constrictive as to the industry's massive scope, even decades ago.

## PR Ethics Codes

### Trailing Behind Digital & Societal Realities

Since the digital media revolution, expansive technology influencing public information collection, distribution, and access has become ubiquitous and increasingly complex.

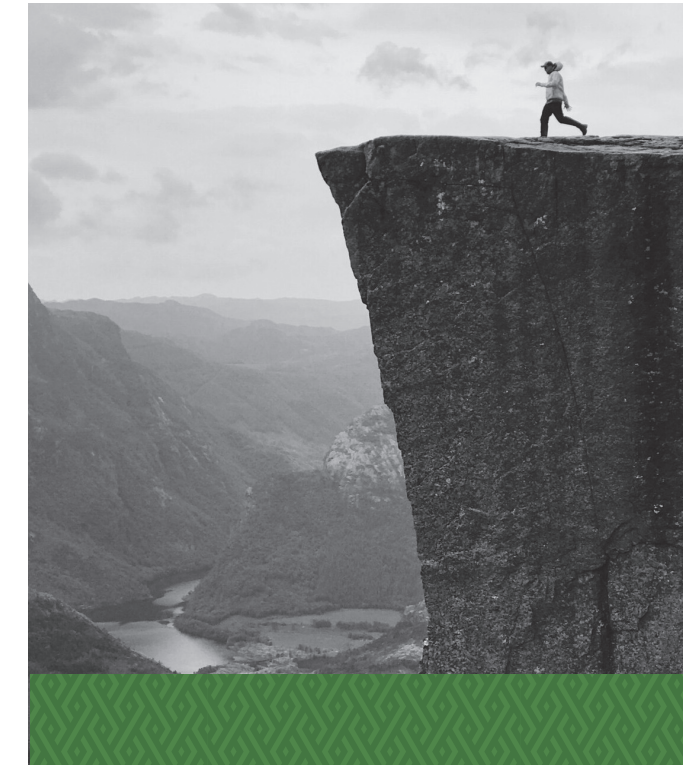
An individual doesn't need to be a credentialed or principled "public relations" practitioner to type some words, hit a button, and globally dispatch online-accessible public information and messaging – whether accurate or inaccurate or ethically derived or not.

Meanwhile, ethical PR practitioners constantly battle in the overcrowded marketplace of ideas for share-of-voice, against such individuals who may or may not be ethical stewards of information, and who, further, may or may not care if they are.

Worldwide (particularly across social media and within organizations lacking professional public relations staff or counsel... and there are many), there often exists limited gatekeeping for quality-control to help ensure ethical integrity of most public information – including its intentional use to influence and persuade in an honest way.

There also have existed for many years intensifying public concerns about 1) the changing dynamics of

In modern practice, however, such a myopic, one-dimensional view of PR – which actually persists in some organizational cultures – poses an even greater disservice, particularly considering just how expansive any professional communicator's ethical competencies must be to operate adequately today, given the explosion of available strategies, tools, and tactics of the industry... and respective ethical implications toward a duty of care.



many news-editorial journalistic media (including diminished staffing and perceived politicization), 2) the implications of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) that might enhance or detract from truthful information exchange, 3) the lack of authentic Diversity / Equity / Inclusion (DEI) advancement to integrate balanced viewpoints and fair treatment of all stakeholders, and 4) confusion about matters of Environmental / Social / Governance (ESG) issues and their impact toward trustworthy policies, practices, and messaging.

These and even more concerns have taken matters of communications ethics to complicated and urgent areas of necessary consideration for PR industry leadership teams and professional associations.

## “Resting on Laurels?”



The PR industry arguably is failing to keep up with this maelstrom of present-day issues on the ethics front... reflected in part by outdated and insufficient PR member-association ethics codes.

As mentioned, many such codes were primarily developed years – even decades – ago, with few or no substantive revisions or addenda to help address and manage more modern ethics issues for today’s professional communicators.

Consequently, there may be some deserved criticism of “resting on laurels” by some PR associations’ over-reliance on the efficacy, relevance, and currency of their long-standing ethics codes, as originally developed in the distant past.

Such codes, while outdated, are not altogether irrelevant, by any means. However, they deserve ethics-review councils and bodies within the associations to take a fresh look, engage external perspectives, and objectively identify what’s missing and/or outdated (with this IBE-generated report providing a helpful starting point).

### For example, according to the IBE’s spring 2022 analysis of PR industry ethics codes:

- “Most of the 24 PR ethics codes analyzed by the IBE lack a timestamp of when they were last updated.” (Some 45% of those codes that indeed show any timestamp of latest revision whatsoever were last revised prior to 2019.)
- “Social or digital media integrity provisions were found in only 10 ethics codes of the 24 evaluated.”
- “Any requirement to correct information publicly issued that is later deemed incorrect was specifically highlighted in only five of the 24 codes” – which may speak to a potential lack of PR industry focus toward addressing mis- / dis- / mal-information concerns across global society.
- “Managing A.I. purposes and intent was mentioned in only four of 24 codes.”
- “Diversity or anti-discrimination provisions were mentioned in 16 codes” – with eight codes containing no mention.
- “ESG as a term was not mentioned in any of the codes.”

## The “Enforcement” Elephant in the Room



As another long-running issue, a passionate debate persists in the PR industry’s association sphere:

### To enforce ethics codes, or not to enforce?

While a simple “yes” or “no” answer to either side of this equation would seem easy enough to derive, there are few straightforward answers and many laws of unintended consequences.

As a first matter, what good does an ethics code serve, if there are no consequences for violating key tenets? The late PRCA Director General Francis Ingham often wrote, “Codes without enforcement are meaningless” – and for years, the PRCA’s own credibility and meteoric growth as an organization thrived under this leadership stance, highlighted most famously with the PRCA’s expulsion of PR agency Bell Pottinger in 2017 for its spearheading a campaign in South Africa, found guilty by the PRCA’s Professional Practices Committee (PPC) of fomenting racial tensions and hatred, essentially using unethical means to achieve an unethical end. Even so, there have been no expulsions from the Association since the Pottinger case.

In short, trade bodies that intentionally choose to demonstrate an evidence-based standard of care and quality-assurance in ethical compliance tend to motivate practitioners working in that industry to

join those associations... and join with enthusiasm – as a perceived seal-of-approval or badge-of-honor underscoring dues-paying members’ own ethical commitment... which is a marketable intangible asset. Interestingly, though, the vast majority of PR associations have opted not to leverage a pro-enforcement ethics code policy as a membership-growth strategy.

### As yet another elephant in the room lumbering alongside the anti-enforcement issue, the PR industry has long battled its own pervasive PR problems.

The industry struggles mightily with the reputation of its own sector. High-profile ethical missteps and short-sightedness of those working in the industry (or perceived to work in it) can erupt into their own crises, drawing outsized attention that might paint the entire industry unfairly with the same broad brushstrokes of condemnation as those who are deemed bad actors.

There is also, of course, the Hollywood machine and its international film and television production counterparts. Decades upon decades of producers and script-writers have rarely wasted an opportunity to portray the PR workforce in popular culture as less-than-desirable in the ethics arena... thereby generating all kinds of



(mis)impressions held by the general public about what “normal” ethical conduct in PR is or should be.

**Given these factors, the entire industry’s workforce needs to wrap its head around this matter of accountability.**

As mentioned, PR is a widely unregulated industry, worldwide – particularly in democratized nations where free speech, press freedoms, and freedom of association are well-established in society.

Ethical accountability and self-policing remain critical, if PR’s workforce wishes to be understood, respected, and valued across other c-suite and boardroom disciplines, and thus, compensated fairly.

Over many decades, a wide-ranging mix of sticks-and-carrots approaches toward encouraging ethics and compliance have taken hold. There are just about as many attitudes and approaches as there are industry associations. Also varied are attitudes toward drawing definitive lines between good behavior, human error, and bad behavior.

Granted, until artificial intelligence usurps far more than it already has, organizations remain human enterprises. As such, human errors and bad judgment calls can happen with anyone in every organization, in the “nobody is perfect” category.

Generally speaking, though, it’s not the odd, isolated incidents, non-malicious mistakes, or human errors-and-omissions that require a heavy hand of code enforcement.

Instead, the egregious behaviors most deserving code-enforcement attention are from those people who demonstrate long, repeated patterns of bad-faith intent to deceive, for purposes of financial, competitive, and/or power-and-position self-gain (and often to the significant harm of fairness toward others’ rightful interests – particularly those who have less power, not to mention even threats to public safety or health, in some PR ethics-misconduct scenarios).



With this delineation made, however, it’s also important to recognize “Why Ethical People Make Unethical Choices,” as referenced in a Harvard Business Review headline in December 2016 by author and executive, Ron Carucci.

**Wrote Carucci:**

*“Despite good intentions, organizations set themselves up for ethical catastrophes by creating environments in which people feel forced to make choices they could never have imagined. Former Federal Prosecutor Serina Vash says, ‘When I first began prosecuting corruption, I expected to walk into rooms and find the vilest people. I was shocked to find ordinarily good people I could well have had coffee with that morning. And they were still good people who’d made terrible choices.’”*

Carucci also made the point, “Too many leaders assume that talking about ethics is something you do when there’s been a scandal...”

Perhaps it’s time for the PR industry to confront its own reticence about speaking frankly and frequently about ethics... by addressing its own constant fears of hypocrisy and judgment and “cancellation” – misplaced or not.

These conversations indeed require courage and self-acknowledgment that we all have flaws and make mistakes, very much including those of us who carry the ethics-advocacy banner most.

## PR’s “Code” Nomenclature: A “Dysfunction Junction?”



Within any organization, industry, or professional sector, corrupt individuals and entities are enabled to thrive in compliance-averse, look-the-other-way management cultures.

This situation becomes more veiled and therefore complicated within trade associations that claim to have a “code” of ethics (with all the credibility that such a claim implies) but nonetheless offer no methodology nor even a stated desire for members to be accountable to the “code” from an evidence-based compliance standpoint – even in the face of documented reports of misconduct.

For example, many PR member associations tout an optional or “aspirational” code of ethics (translated: unenforced).

Often, the basis of this decision hinges on an association’s avoidance of litigation risks and associated legal expense and reputational hazards – which can be a justifiable business decision. Some associations are very transparent and straightforward in stating this case; some, less so, which creates problems of their own.

**However, either way, there are consequences to a non-enforcement policy.**

An association’s dues-paying members can claim to abide by “aspirational” codes (and the vast majority likely do abide by them, in both aspiration and daily

action, in good faith).

Meanwhile, though, other association members of less honorable intent (who generally might compose a small or even micro-minority of the membership) may freely join and interact within the membership ranks – and even successfully rise to significant leadership positions – while knowing full-well that no authority will take stock of their noncompliance with the “aspirational” code in any way, shape, or form, at any time... even if issues are reported through whatever reporting pathways exist.

(It should be further noted that organizations with a zero-enforcement policy generally are not well-known for the quality of their misconduct-reporting mechanisms, since they’re practically a moot point). Within these resulting scenarios, anyone and everyone who strokes a check to pay dues annually to a PR association with only “aspirational” codes receives their virtual ethics “participation trophy,” so to speak, to post on their website or display in the front lobby, given that we as an industry are hyper-focused on appearances, right?...

**But does it really mean anything if roundly unethical practices are habitually unchecked?**

It’s a reasonable question – not to begrudge the virtues of “aspiring” to this or that, but as is always the case, hope is not a strategy, and only “aspiring” to a deliverable doesn’t verifiably deliver anything.

Even more at issue is a PR association that takes an unclear or outright-confusing hybrid approach: claiming its code is “aspirational” while simultaneously allowing selective application of alternative governance (bylaws, policies & procedures, or even unwritten “rules”) to enforce whatever a leadership wishes to enforce, whether in an “ethics” category or not. These methodologies hold clear potential to target whistleblowers of observed misconduct or target others who might be attacked for personal, political, or competitive reasons (the latter being a potential violation of some nations’ antitrust laws).

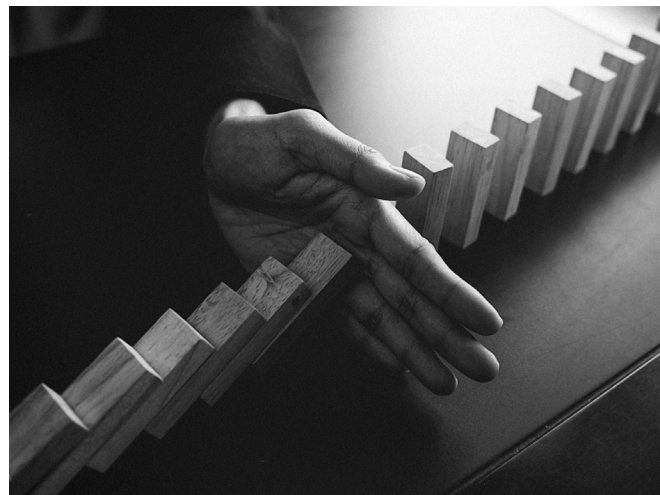
Speaking of the potential for law-breaking, hybrid approaches to ethics-code enforcement might present the unique conundrum of PR associations promising publicly to expel any member found guilty of a felony in a governmental court of law.

This so-called “standard” sends a different mixed-message entirely, or at least one with a very loud subtext: that the only lowest-common-denominator of “unethical” PR practice worthy of member expulsion include such crimes as theft, murder, rape, assault, burglary, extortion, bribery, etc.

Such offenses set an egregiously low “PR ethics” bar, whether by “aspiration,” or in practice. Some colleagues might even reasonably perceive such a criminal-level performance bar to be an embarrassment to the industry.

As another problem of unclear “codes” and subjective, hybrid rulemaking, a “Let’s make it up as we go along” approach toward compliance can easily and accidentally evolve, if an organization is caught in real-time within an actual compliance problem – certainly if it’s a crisis-level event.

For example, if a PR association fails to have well-considered and pre-vetted ethics / compliance rules and procedures posted in advance of a compliance



failure by a member or even by the association itself, then it’s likely that association management might create rules to follow while in the throes of adjudicating a violation.

The inherent chaos of a “We’ll build this bicycle while we’re riding it” situation then lends itself to all kinds of short-term misjudgments – such as creating rules that might automatically render purposeful favor toward a particular desired outcome, or render favor to a particularly powerful individual or entity regardless of wrongdoing and irrespective of whether such favor actually serves the best interests of the PR industry or the organization’s integrity.

Bad precedents are then established for the record, which yield their own future consequences.

### **These situations as described easily bastardize the entire ethic of “ethics” itself, in their own conflicted processes.**

Further complicating matters are issues of internal politics or ideological politics that are becoming more divisive realities for associations and entire industries, most certainly including public relations.

PR associations – like any trade association in any other industry sector, as many historical case studies have documented – can become driven inordinately

by internal personality-driven politics that can devolve to slipshod, selective, self-serving methodologies toward addressing ethics-and-compliance issues.

### **As such, organizations can ultimately decline to a dysfunctional place culturally and systemically.**

When such fundamental breakdowns occur, it can derail compliance efforts, or, at the darkest end of the spectrum, lead to people weaponizing rules and rulemaking unfairly, in a particular self-interest, or even hyperextending to illegality. Such situations can become slippery slopes, often occurring well-beyond a larger membership’s range of view – since concealment is an inherent property of unethical and illegal activity.

### **For all of these reasons enumerated (and then some), this nomenclature issue of even calling an ethics or conduct “code” a “code” becomes immediately problematic for so-called “codes” that actually function in promise and practice as only mere suggestions.**

An ethics code that’s unenforced is, arguably, precisely that.

Merriam-Webster defines the word “code,” as “a systematic statement of a body of law, especially: one given statutory force” and “a system of principles or rules.”

So, consider these words again:  
**“Systematic.”**  
**“Law.”**  
**“Statutory force.”**  
**“Rules.”**

None of the above words lend themselves comfortably to mere “aspirations” or other gray-area subjectivities in which one might opt-in or opt-out, on a whim.



Yet the PR industry – a line of work that prides itself in its use and command of precise language – roundly uses the word “code,” often with very little to any authentic consideration as to its true meaning and implications, within the PR sector and our industry’s association community.

It’s arguably a wholesale misapplication of the word “code” if a “code of ethics” is instead functioning by definition as a “Guidelines of Ethics” or set of “Ethically Nice Ideas,” which far more accurately implies the optional nature of an organization’s choice of a non-enforcement policy.

After all, like any entity, a PR association can’t have it both ways and still maintain credibility; the implied gravitas of “code”-level stated standards and enforcement... but with zero enforcement of stated standards.

This entire matter of ethics-washing becomes further indicative of the PR industry’s larger PR problem of being considered by the public, the news media, and other management disciplines as an industry that’s all about nice words and assurances and promises and posturing that all is well with the world, but meanwhile, Rome could be burning.

### **There’s no bad rap more damaging than a bad rap that’s deserved.**



# Lack of Whistleblower-Protection & Anti-Retaliation:



It should be noted that in the IBE's own analysis of PR association ethics codes, it is stated that "Despite the enforcement of codes of ethics in thirteen (PR) associations, little importance is given to fair treatment of whistle-blowers and anti-retaliation provisions. Fair treatment of whistle-blowers was not mentioned in eleven of the codes... None of the codes specifically provides a provision for anti-retaliation."

These glaring omissions are critically relevant in the #PRethics conversation – particularly given documented spikes worldwide in employee retaliation against those who report observed misconduct.

Such data has been documented in impressive, quantitative detail by the Ethics & Compliance Initiative's (ECI's) multi-year, longitudinal Global Business Ethics Survey®.

ECI has noted that in workplace settings, retaliation can take many forms and appear either overtly or subtly.

In member-association community settings, retaliation is often subtle – although its impacts can

be in inverse-correlation to subtlety in its degree of overt damage inflicted... including to colleagues' hard-earned professional reputations, mental health and emotional wellness.

## As but some examples of subtle or hidden retaliation:

suddenly excluding people from meetings, events, or committees without notice or explanation

spreading false rumors

gossiping

gaslighting

taking credit for someone else's work

misusing power or authority for purposes of intimidation

purposely withholding information that a member is entitled to

undermining candidates for association leadership positions with whisper campaigns or other "dirty tricks"

making unnecessarily harmful / hurtful / belittling remarks purposely within earshot of a retaliation target.

PR industry practitioners and those in PR academia should take notice of precisely who is "minding the store" of industry association governance and ethical stewardship and insist on demonstrated collaboration, open dialogue, and consensus – in service to all.

A non-industry-specific study published in 2009 entitled, "One Voice, But Whose Voice? Exploring What Drives Trade Association Activity," by Michael L. Barnett of Rutgers Business School, "...measure(d) the activity of 148 major industry trade associations over time and relate(d) this activity to the performance of the relevant industries and dominant firms within them."

**The study found implications that "large firms exert control over trade association agendas and may use these communal organizations to advance their own interests rather than the shared interests of the entire industry."**

Without question, any association that opts to go the enforcement route needs a strong, accountable, diverse, and evidence-focused staff management team and reputable governance board at the apex of the organization, within a healthy, communicative culture of openness, transparency, candor, responsiveness, and non-retaliation – one that all members, staff, and other stakeholders (not just the powerful ones) can trust.

## The Complexities of PR Code Enforcement

Once the question of enforcement vs. non-enforcement is answered, if the answer concluded by a PR association board of management is, "Yes, we will enforce our code," then the next question is... How? It's in this arena – the mechanics of how – that code-enforcement complexities intensify exponentially... and the real work of organizational ethics begins in earnest.

### As but only some of the questions that enforcement-driven PR associations must ask themselves (and association members must demand of governance boards):

- What is the process of enforcement action going to be, and is the public – or at least dues-paying members of the association – even allowed to know what it is? (If the process isn't fully public-facing, then what is the reason for this lack of disclosure / transparency, and is it justifiable?)
- Will a clear, explanatory, logical, and user-friendly

complaints process be outlined and made available online, with a spirit (and documented intent) of transparency?

- Are members of all adjudication bodies of complaints and reports of misconduct clearly identified in the public sphere, such that obvious conflicts of interest can be identified to the extent that they are not tolerated?
- If a complaint is made by a plaintiff against a PR practitioner or firm (a defendant), is the matter dealt with in a way that can bear reasonable public scrutiny, or, alternately, is the process held in secret (with concealed adjudication personnel who also are selected secretly by secretive decision-making bodies), all under contrived auspices of plausible deniability? Does such a construct merit trust by members and the public?
- Are known friends and cronies of either complainants or defendants allowed to adjudicate

enforcement reviews and decisions? What about known enemies, competitors, or detractors for either side? How do policies and practices comport with anti-trust government regulation?

- Are there any documentation requirements in the process to substantiate charges leveled against a colleague as a provable ethics violation... as opposed to grievances that only amount to speculations / hearsay, petty disgruntlement, political differences, or personality conflicts?
- Do those accused of wrongdoing have an opportunity to face their accusers? Or are accusers allowed to remain veiled even from a defendant standing accused and facing the potential of permanent, career-ending reputational damage?
- Is there any whistleblower-protection ethic within adjudication policies and standards, to help protect anyone who previously has reported documented misconduct by others from being directly retaliated against unfairly, particularly if large position-driven imbalances of power exist among decision-makers, complainants and/or defendants?
- Is there an established timeline for the process – from start to finish – and are matters undertaken and reviewed expeditiously... or are complainants and/or defendants in an enforcement matter left twisting in the wind for inordinate time durations, without notice or explanation, and with potentially excessive damage not only to parties' professional reputations but also to their mental wellbeing?
- Is media coverage of a publicly announced "investigation" (or, purposeful information voids, which can be just as impactful or damaging) leveraged to any party's unfair detriment by those who control the process?
- Are complainants and defendants in an ethics complaint allowed to advocate for themselves publicly, or are they placed under a non-disclosure

mandate (gag-order)? Further, is a gag-order only enforced against one party and not the other – thereby allowing one side of a dispute to sway public opinion in their favor all they wish, while the other side is muffled and rendered defenseless in courts of public opinion?

### **These actual issues – stated above only in generalities – have come to the fore in recent years through PR industry association reviews of ethics and alleged (mis)conduct matters.**

A PR association's **infrastructure of transparency and trust** must be purposely planned, built, communicated, complied with, and sustained with continuous improvement, to support adequately how enforcement-driven adjudication processes are managed.

Once such an infrastructure is built, PR association leaders who embrace code enforcement must step back 10 paces or so, examine the totality of what they've created to support whatever they originally wished to accomplish, and then ask of themselves:

### **Have we created a monster?**

Are our processes robust, open, transparent, and fair (such as one would reasonably expect in a normal court of law within a democratized nation) or instead, does our adjudication process for code of ethics enforcement essentially allow "kangaroo courts"... with secrecy, conflicts of interest, unfair competition, and infiltration of other agendas that have nothing to do with upholding integrity for the PR industry?

The answer to these questions might either spotlight an organization's good faith and compliance-focused competency... or, failings in these areas.

Whatever system is adopted, it needs to be defensible against tests of scrutiny with at least basic

rigor applied. While it's impossible to satisfy every opinion of every person in every situation, the degree of disclosure, transparency, and responsiveness will always speak volumes of honorable organizational-management intent.

### **These valid concerns require all PR industry practitioners to rise to a much higher level of engagement, discernment, and, most of all, care, than what might have ever been required in past decades.**

After all, if PR association members across the full field of practice simply don't care about these matters,

then neither will leadership bodies, their boards of directors, nor their voting member delegations. An industry of people who simply don't care – and instead are just going along to get along, paycheck to paycheck – will ultimately get precisely what they deserve.

Because the PR industry's volume, quality, and impact of work have such expansive implications to today's external media and global societies, it's far more than just PR practitioners who need to care...

### **Everyone must.**

*"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."*  
– Alice Walker

*"The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."*  
– Albert Einstein

*"Numbers serve to discipline rhetoric. Without them it is too easy to follow flights of fancy, to ignore the world as it is and to remold it nearer the heart's desire."* – Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"If you're afraid to use your voice, give up your seat at the table."* – Michelle Obama

*"To know what is right and not do it is the worst cowardice."* – Confucius

*"There are two reasons why we don't trust people. First, we don't know them. Second, we know them."*  
– Unknown

*"Nobody's perfect. The only one that ever was, was crucified."* – Loretta Lynn

*"Fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision."*  
– Winston Churchill

*"If you get, give. If you learn, teach."*  
– Maya Angelou

*"Trust, but verify."* – Ronald Reagan

*"I am who I am today because of the choices I made yesterday."* – Eleanor Roosevelt

*"An army of sheep, led by a lion, is better than an army of lions, led by a sheep."*  
– Alexander the Great

*"The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do."* – B.F. Skinner

*"The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim: he or she has become a threat."* – James Baldwin

*"Self-esteem comes from achievements. Not from lax standards and false praise."*  
– Condoleezza Rice

*"When you fight corruption, it fights back."*  
– Nuhu Ribadu

*"Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't."*  
– Margaret Thatcher

*"When plunder becomes a way of life for a group... over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it."* – Frederic Bastiat

*"No one is more hated than he who speaks the truth."* – Plato

*"A strong woman stands up for herself. A stronger woman stands up for everyone else."* – Unknown

# Results

## Top-Line Findings

According to the IBE's report, "the results of the (IBE) bespoke scoring system applied suggest that 17% of the codes possess strong elements of good practice,

29% possess elements of good practice but lack in other areas, whilst 54% of the codes show significant room for improvement."

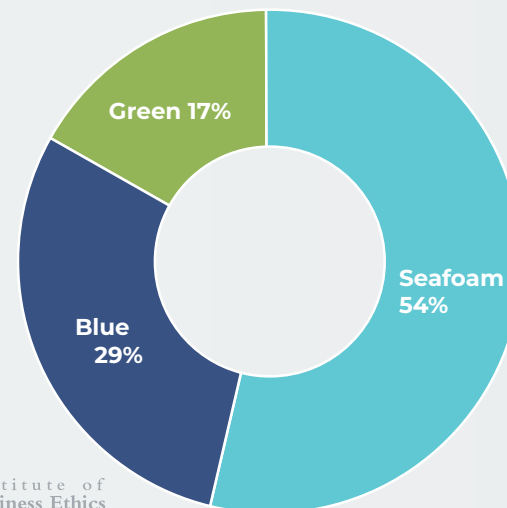
### Figure 1: Overall Scores

As noted in the report, "The codes analyzed were assessed overall using a (color code) system:

"**Green** (n=4) were the codes which demonstrated most adherence to good practice.

"**Seafoam** (n=13) were in general not consistent with a considerable number of good practices as set out in this report.

"**Blue** (n=7) were codes that demonstrated considerable elements of good practice but could be significantly improved."



Thus, according to the IBE's analysis, the vast majority of global PR industry association ethics codes – a whopping 83% — have at least some work to do to demonstrate "strong elements of good practice" in codifying ethical tenets... at least on paper.

Of course, as another matter entirely of separating "lip-service" from evidence-based compliance, PR associations should always take the lead toward

applying theoretical ideals and principles beyond those merely written on paper – which is essential toward any organization's healthy culture and credibility.

(The IBE's scope of work did not include any survey of how many complaints or ethics issues each of the 24 organizations has received, undertaken, or resolved – either successfully or unsuccessfully – in recent

years, nor have definitions of "successful" versus "unsuccessful" resolution of ethics issues been defined broadly across the PR industry... which present potential opportunities for future industry dialogue and standards of practice.)

### Among other top-line findings noted in the IBE's Executive Summary:

- "54% of associations state that they enforce their code of ethics. Of these, 46% make the complaint process easy and 31% make decisions and positions by ethics committees easily available. However, most codes do not provide whistle blower protection, whilst none of the codes provides anti-retaliation provisions.
- "The six core provisions of PR codes of ethics relate to: honesty, accuracy, managing confidence, fairness to competitors and colleagues, managing conflicts of interests, and disclosure of client and interests represented. However, 29% of the codes lack one or more of these core provisions.
- "Apart from sixteen possible provisions that had been specifically identified beforehand to form

part of the analysis, fourteen other provisions have been noted across a number of codes, the most pronounced of which are: anti-bribery, personal capacity building and not over-promising.

- "Codes of ethics are a requirement for membership in 83% of the associations. It is also common practice that codes are intended to be enforced and, when enforced, there are detailed procedural documents.
- "Whilst 29% of the codes displayed good practice including the major provisions and employing positive and inclusive language, the rest, 71%, display considerable room for improvement.
- "Many codes could be more engaging: 58% are judged to lack in terms of user friendliness and are non-descript plain-text documents with no or little visual design.
- "Most codes are deficient in being un-dated. 55% of those that are dated have been revised since 2019. It is likely that many codes are ripe for review."

## Findings and PR Industry Recommendations

As the following content is stated / re-printed verbatim from the IBE's report (with limited exclusions of association-specific proprietary data), the remainder of this document presents the IBE's findings, as well as observations, under five thematic headings: solid foundations, user friendliness, leadership role, content, and enforcement of the codes. It provides an overview of the findings, the implications of those findings, as well as recommendations for best practice in the PR industry.

### Solid Foundations

Throughout this theme the basic hygiene factors of the codes of ethics are analyzed. These factors are the

ease of locating the code, length, naming conventions, structure, and updates.

#### Locating the code of ethics

The ease of locating the code of ethics is an indicator of the prominence that the association gives to the code and influences the user experience. Efforts required to locate the code of ethics have been categorized as: intuitive, not intuitive, and external as follows:

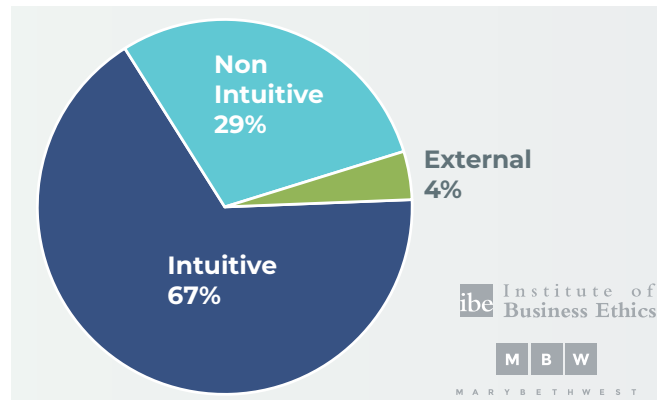
- Intuitive refers to codes of ethics that are displayed prominently, clearly titled and easily located within two clicks of the landing page (n=16).
- Not intuitive refers to codes that are not easily



found on an association's website. The most common causes for this were unclear titles, located more than two clicks from the landing page, or scattered over multiple pages (n=7).

- External refers to one (n=1) association whose code was not available on its website but rather published on an external site.

### Ease of locating the code



1. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics are displayed prominently, clearly titled and located within two clicks of the landing page.

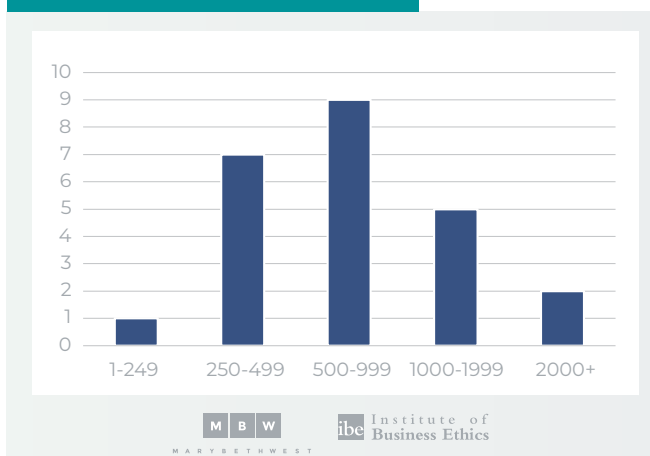
### Length

There is not necessarily an ideal length of a code of ethics, but it is instructive to know the typical size of codes present in the industry. Some associations also have other documents which are closely related to the codes of ethics but displayed as separate attachments. These documents are generally related to enforcement procedures and specialized policies, such as those related to social media.

The codes of ethics analyzed average 963 words. Most (n=16) contain between 250 and 1000 words. Figure 2 displays the distribution of length across the codes of ethics.

Four dedicated procedure documents were available, and their average length was of 2,818 words. This is understandable, since enforcement procedure documents require a level of detail. Six dedicated policy documents were available and these averaged 1,210 words.

Figure 2: Length in Words



2. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics of PR associations are kept as short as possible, while ensuring appropriate coverage and usability. There should be sufficient depth to provide real guidance, but detailed procedures, such as those relating to enforcement, are best provided in separate, dedicated documents. This also allows for a different tone of voice to be used in the diverse documents in line with their purpose and audience.

### Naming conventions

Some companies choose a title or sub-title for their code of ethics that makes it more specific to the company concerned. However, PR associations' titles tend to be quite basic – which is not necessarily a problem, though it is perhaps something that can be thought about in the future. The majority (n=11) are named “Code of Ethics,” often preceded by the name

3. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics are clearly titled and that the name of the association is included in the title, as this makes it easier to locate via a search engine.

of the association. Four are named “Code of Conduct”, whilst three use a title which contains “Professional” (namely Code of Professional Standards, Professional Charter and Code of Ethics and Professional Standards). The others (n=6) use non-standard titles such as Ethics Platform and Ethical Principles.

### Structure

The structure of a code of ethics is one of the most

important hygiene factors. It provides an insight into how the document is organized. Most of the codes are structured in the form of a short introduction, guidance, and no conclusion.

Introductions were analyzed according to length and categorized as: short, containing less than 10 lines; medium, containing between 11 and 20 lines; and long, containing more than 20 lines. Whilst three (n=3) codes did not have an introduction at all, most introductions were short (n=15), four were of medium length whilst two were categorized as long.

An introduction sets the scene for a code. As an example of good practice, PRSA features a medium length introduction which is aimed at garnering support for the code:

*The PRSA Code of Ethics applies to PRSA members. The Code is designed to be a useful guide for PRSA members as they carry out their ethical responsibilities. This document is designed to anticipate and accommodate, by precedent, ethical challenges that may arise. The scenarios outlined in the Code provision are actual examples of misconduct. More will be added as experience with the Code occurs.*

*PRSA is committed to ethical practices. The level of public trust PRSA members seek, as we serve the public good, means we have taken on a special obligation to operate ethically. The value of member reputation depends upon the ethical conduct of everyone affiliated with the PRSA. Each of us sets an example for each other – as well as other professionals – by our pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct.*

In the body of the document, several codes start with a declaration of principles or values. This declaration enables the user to understand at a glance which are the most important values that the association embraces. The following example of good practice comes from the next graphic showing a PRSA example intended for PRINZ:

*Emphasis on enforcement of the Code has been eliminated. But, the PRSA Board of Directors retains the right to bar from membership or expel from the Society any individual who has been or is sanctioned by a government agency or convicted in a court of law of an action that fails to comply with the Code.*

*Ethical practice is the most important obligation of a PRSA member. We view the Member Code of Ethics as a model for other professions, organizations and professionals.*

- PRSA

A considerable number of codes did not include a declaration of values or principles but rather dived immediately into a set of more detailed rules. These rules ranged between five and thirty-six in number. As an example of good practice in rules, below is an extract from the PR Council Code of Ethics and Principles. This demonstrates that even rules can be written in a clear, non-legalistic manner.

### Values

These values provide the foundation for the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. They are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviour and decision-making processes.

<p><b>ADVOCACY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent.</li> <li>» We provide a voice for the ideas, facts and viewpoints of those we represent to aid informed public debate.</li> </ul>	<p><b>HONESTY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We are accurate and truthful in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with the public.</li> </ul>	<p><b>EXPERTISE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We acquire and responsibly use specialised knowledge and experience.</li> <li>» We advance the profession through continued professional development, research and education.</li> <li>» We build mutual understanding, credibility and relationships among an array of institutions and audiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INDEPENDENCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We provide objective counsel to those we represent.</li> <li>» We are accountable for our actions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>LOYALTY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We are faithful to those we represent, while honouring our obligations to serve the public interest.</li> <li>» We safeguard the confidences of former or present employers and clients.</li> </ul>	<p><b>FAIRNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, suppliers, the media and the society.</li> <li>» We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression.</li> </ul>

1. We adhere to the highest standards of ethics in the public relations profession. The employees of public relations firms are members of a profession which has well-established guidelines for ethical behavior through professional organizations such as PRSA and the PR Council, as well as within their individual firms. We expect each of our employees to commit themselves to those guidelines and advise our clients' communications professionals to do so as well.

Members and their employees will be honest and accurate when recording time charges and seeking reimbursement of expenses, and member firms will not solicit or accept kickbacks or under-the-table payments in connection with business development efforts.

– PR Council

None of the codes analyzed contains a conclusion in the traditional sense. Ten codes do not contain anything at the end, whilst other codes have different approaches, which include:

- Contact information
- Declaration for endorsement by members
- A list of organizations that have signed up to the code
- Other resources, including FAQs and external links
- Other documents, such as arbitration procedures

The extract from CIPR below provides an example of good practice where, in conclusion to the code of ethics, contact details as well as other links are featured:

#### FREE ETHICS HOTLINE

At some point in your career you may be faced with an ethical dilemma. If the right thing to do isn't clear and you don't know which course of action to take, call our Ethics Hotline for free and confidential advice and support.

The hotline is open from Monday to Friday from 09:00 until 17:00 (GMT). Call +44 (0)20 7631 6944.

#### MAKING A COMPLAINT AGAINST A MEMBER

Anyone can bring a complaint against a member under the [Code of Conduct](#). This is an outline of how we [enforce the code](#) and manage complaints.

The process for making and hearing a complaint is governed by a set of [regulations](#).

[Download a guide to our complaints process \(pdf\)](#).

For further information or advice on the CIPR Code of Conduct and the processes that support it, please contact:

Kevin Taylor Chart.PR, FCIPR, Regulatory Consultant

[KevinT@cipr.co.uk](mailto:KevinT@cipr.co.uk)

0207 631 6944

#### OTHER PUBLIC RESOURCES

All members of the CIPR are bound by our Code of Conduct. A full list of our members is available in the [PR Register](#).

See our [guidance on the Code and professional conduct](#).

See our [guidance on professional standards in lobbying](#).

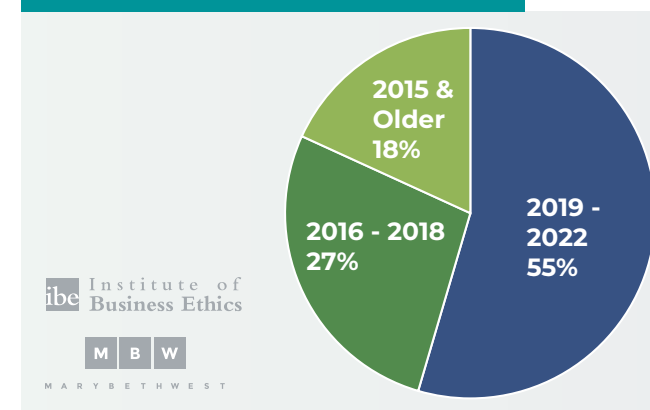
## Regular updates

Core ethical principles and values in PR are expected to be longstanding. However, even if they do not change, how they are to be applied and the context of application will change. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics are revised every three years – and dated accordingly. These practices do not seem to be prevalent in the codes analyzed. Thirteen codes were not even dated. As can be seen in Figure 3 shown on the next page, from the ones which published the date, 55% (n=6) have been recently created or revised. 18% (n=2) have been revised between 2016 and 2018, 9% (n=1) have been revised between 2012 and 2014, whilst 18% (n=2) were revised prior to 2011. Only six codes specifically mention that the code of ethics is reviewed regularly.

4. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics include:

- a short to medium length introduction proportionate to the length of the code
- a concise yet clear declaration of principles and/or values
- detailed guidance, perhaps in the form of rules that are clearly demarcated and use inclusive, non-legalistic, clear language

Figure 3: Date of codes of ethics



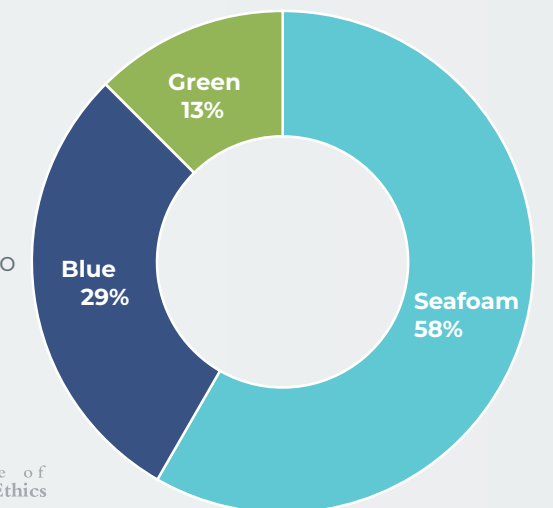
## User friendliness

The best codes of ethics are written with the user in mind. With this perspective the user of a PR association's code of ethics would typically read the document as part of their membership process and occasionally as they form part of the association. They want to understand what values the association holds,

Figure 4: User friendliness

When assessing against these criteria, a (color code) system was employed.

**Green** (n=3) are well designed documents which make use of design elements that make them user-friendly, engaging, and memorable. **Seafoam** (n=14) are documents that are non-descript, plain-text with no or little visual design. **Blue** (n=7) are documents that contain some elements of good practice but could be greatly improved.



Whereas no one code displayed all elements of good practice, several distinct areas for improvement were observed across codes that were marked as **seafoam**. These:

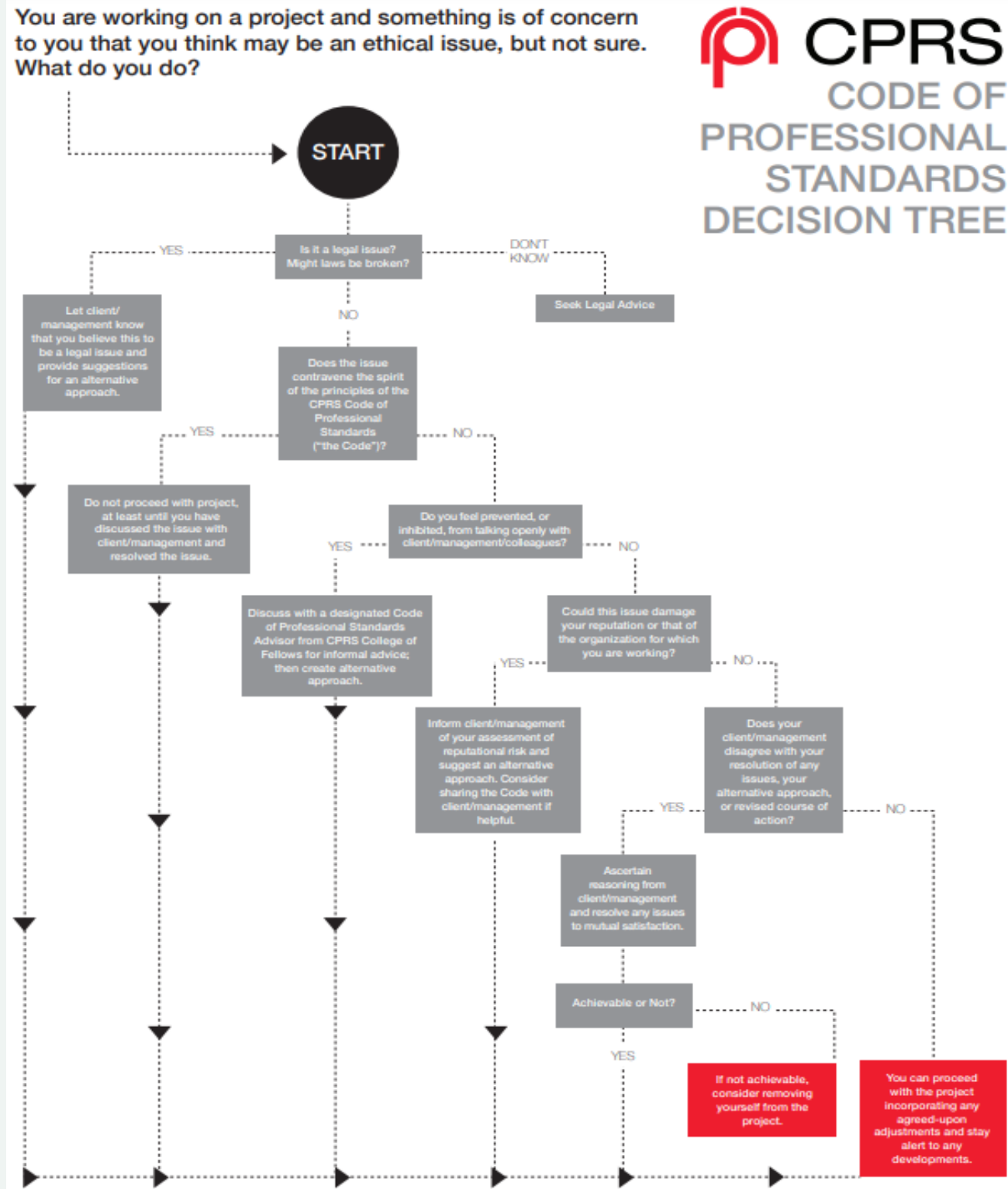
- were scattered over a number of links in different areas of the webpage
- were poorly presented or demarcated
- lacked visual design elements

- had vague or highly theoretical, and lacked practical, elements
- were a screen shot type of document uploaded onto the website.

The following are examples of elements of user-friendly design that have been observed in codes that were categorized as green or blue.



1 A decision tree that helps users in decision making, as presented by CPRS:



2 A declaration of values using elements of visual design, as presented by PRSA:



3 An appealing and easy to read code using visual design elements and including a declaration of values, by PRINZ:

**PRINZ Code of Ethics**

**Overview**  
Public relations professionals use communications to develop or maintain trusting, productive relationships between our clients or employers and their stakeholders. We promote the views of those we represent to contribute to public debate and informed decision-making in a democratic society.

**Values**  
These values provide the foundation for the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. They are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviour and decision-making processes.

**1. Advocacy and Honesty**  
A member shall:  
i. Provide independent, objective counsel for clients or employers.  
ii. Promote the ethical, well-founded views of clients or employers.  
iii. Be honest and accurate in all communications – and act promptly to correct erroneous communications.  
iv. Avoid deceptive practices.

**2. Conflicts of Interest**  
A member shall:  
i. Disclose promptly any existing or potential conflict of interest to affected clients or organisations.  
ii. Disclose any client or business interest published or broadcast editorial work.

**3. Professionalism**  
A member shall:  
i. Actively pursue personal professional development.  
ii. Explain realistically what public relations activities can accomplish.  
iii. Counsel colleagues on ethical decision-making.  
iv. Decline representation of clients or organisations that urge or require actions contrary to this Code.  
v. Not engage in irrelevant or unsubstantiated personal criticism.

**4. Balancing Openness and Privacy**  
A member shall:  
i. Promote open communication in the public interest wherever possible.  
ii. Respect the rights of others to have their say.  
iii. Be prepared to name clients or employers represented and the sponsors for causes and interests represented.  
iv. Safeguard the confidences and privacy rights of present, former and prospective clients and employers.

**5. Law Abiding**  
A member shall:  
i. Abide by the laws affecting the practice of public relations and the laws and regulations affecting the client.

**Resources**  
www.prinz.org.nz > About us > Code of Ethics  
In 2005, PRINZ adopted the Global Alliance Protocol on Ethics, as a supporting document to the PRINZ Code of Ethics.  
www.globalalliancepr.org > Ethics > Global Code of Ethics



**4 The code of ethics available for download in different languages, by IPRA:**

This consolidated code is available in the following languages:

Select a pdf:

Select a pdf:

- Albanian
- Arabic
- Bosnian
- Bulgarian
- Dutch
- English
- Estonian
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Greek
- Hebrew
- Indonesian
- Italian
- Japanese
- Kazakh
- Korean
- Latvian
- Lithuanian

- 6. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics:
  - are presented on a dedicated webpage which provides all the links relating to ethics documents clearly marked
  - have clearly marked sections and key words
  - employ elements of visual design that make the document engaging
  - are provided in a downloadable format that can be read by screen readers, for example PDF or Microsoft Word
  - are considered for translation into different languages in the case of international associations
  - display a clear and concise declaration of values or key principles
  - include elements that help users in their decision making, such as decision trees, examples, or FAQs.

**5 Providing examples of malpractice as presented by CPRA:**

*“A member who works for a coffee maker and donates an expensive coffee machine to a columnist for one of the leading magazines to influence positive writing about product.”*

**6 Elements of visual design as presented, by COM-ENT:**



**Leadership role**

The IBE advocates the importance of leadership in creating an ethical culture in organizations. As well as highlighting the role of organizational leaders in embedding an ethical culture, as best practice the IBE recommends an introduction from senior leadership in corporate codes of ethics.

A PR association is a different sort of organization. In particular, it is an organization of peers and therefore the nature of leadership is different. Nevertheless, senior leadership can be an important source of support for a code of ethics. Leadership involvement was less prominent than one might expect, though. However, some good practice was observed, including the following.

**1. Providing the details of contact persons in case of need as provided by CPRS:**

For more on this topic, please see *Everyday Ethics*, prepared for CPRS by Guy Versailles, ARP, FSCRCP, Stephanie Yates and Elizabeth Hirst, ARP, FSCRCP.

Robyn Quinn, MA, APR, FCPRS	British Columbia
Sharlene Smith, APR, FCPRS LM	British Columbia
Kim Blanchette, APR, FCPRS	Alberta
Colin Babiuk, MA, APR, FCPRS	Alberta
Derrick Pieters, APR, FCPRS LM	Alberta
Blair Peberdy, APR, FCPRS LM	Ontario
Jean Boileau, ARP, FSCRCP LM	Quebec
Deanna Drendel, ARP, FSCRCP	Quebec
Antoine Landry, ARP, FSCRCP	Quebec
Daniel Granger, ARP, FSCRCP	Quebec
Guy Versailles, ARP, FSCRCP	Quebec
Joel Levesque, APR, FCPRS LM	New Brunswick

**2. A clear designation of roles as showcased by PRCA and CIPR:**

*The code of conduct is governed by a series of roles which include an arbiter, the CIPR Board of Directors, a Chairman, the Professional Standards Panel, and a regulatory consultant. Each of these parties has designated roles.*

– CIPR

*7. It shall be the duty of the Professional Practices Committee promptly to investigate any complaint properly brought before them against a member.*

*8. The Committee will recommend to the Board sanctions on the member concerned where serious breaches of the PRCA Professional Charter or Memorandum and Articles of Association have been proven. Such sanctions may extend to suspension or termination of membership coupled with a published censure. The Committee is empowered to impose sanctions (short of suspension or termination) on the member concerned where minor breaches of the PRCA Professional Charter or Memorandum and Articles of Association have been proven, including, but not necessarily limited to warnings, admonishments or reprimands which may be published.*

*9. Matters that are currently the subject of a legal action will not be covered by the Committee. The Committee should advise all parties concerned of this as soon as possible.*

– PRCA

**3. An introduction of an ethics council as well as the contact details of the general manager at the top of the code of ethics page, by the NCA:**

**Ethical advice**

The Ethics Council puts professional ethics on the agenda by participating in public debate, and by assisting the members of the Communication Association in difficult ethical issues.

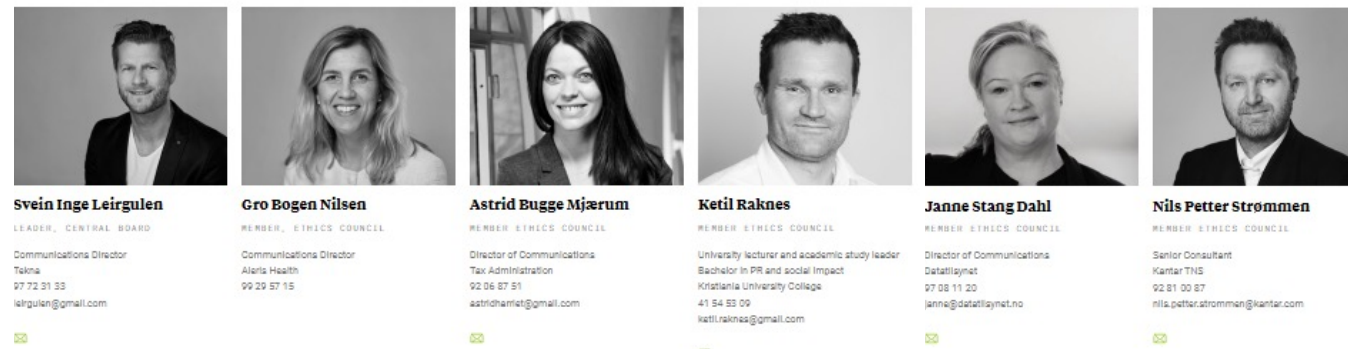
Do you experience ethical challenges in a work context? We will gladly help you. Send an e-mail to [etikk@kommunikasjon.no](mailto:etikk@kommunikasjon.no) or contact general manager Therese Manus (48064462).

**4. Ethics is tackled at the highest executive level in the organizational structure, as seen through PRINZ:**

Making a complaint against a member.

Anyone can bring a complaint against a member under the Code of Ethics. Read more on the complaints process here. For further information or advice on the Code of Ethics, please **contact the Chief Executive**.

## Members of the Ethics Council



7. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics include:

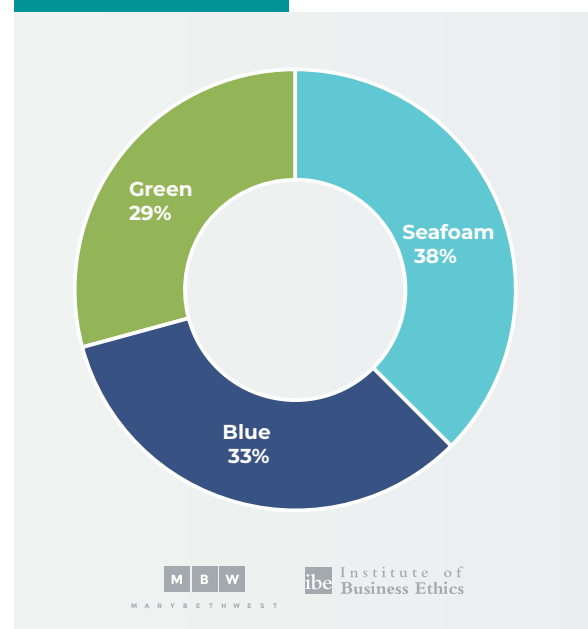
- a clear governance structure that highlights who is responsible for the creation and upkeep of the code
- an introduction and endorsement from the association's leadership.

## Content

This section of the report deals with two related areas of focus, namely tone of voice and provisions.

Provisions and tone of voice were assessed using a (color code) system. A relatively balanced distribution was observed. **Green** (n=7) refers to codes which included all the major provisions and employed positive, inclusive, and non-threatening language.

Figure 5: Content



**Seafoam** (n=9) refers to codes which missed several provisions and/or were structured as a list of rules and/or written in legalistic language and structured like a rule book. **Blue** (n=8) refers to codes which may have missed elements of important provisions and/or neither use positive and inclusive language nor legalistic language, but mostly employed a passive tone of voice.

## Tone of voice

The tone of voice of a code of ethics conveys the spirit in which the code was written and the relationship between the association and its members. It is key to creating a shared understanding. The codes which convey a positive message are the ones which include all the major provisions, as well as employ positive, inclusive, and non-threatening language. They present clear guidance in a way that implies shared and voluntary commitment to the standards.

A parenthesis is opened here in relation to texts that were not written in English. A number of codes and websites were written in other languages and therefore some elements of the code may have been lost in translation. Also, a level of cultural

sensitivity needs to be practiced. Whilst international associations have a clear mandate to be multi-national, a number of associations were national. The wording and tone of voice of the code reflects the culture in which they are embedded. Particular examples are the presentation of the codes of NCA (Norway) and PRSJ (Japan).

Shared voluntary commitment was assessed through clauses in codes that point towards ethics being a shared responsibility. Eleven associations referred to this shared responsibility. This clause can be showcased by the provisions in three particular codes: PRSA, PRISA and PRSJ:

*The level of public trust PRSA members seek, as we serve the public good, means we have taken on a special obligation to operate ethically. The value of member reputation depends upon the ethical conduct of everyone affiliated with PRSA. Each of us sets an example for each other – as well as other professionals – by our pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct.*

– PRSA (a similar clause was observed in PRISA)

*The purpose of public relations is to foster a healthy value system between organizations and their stakeholders and the society and to steadily build relationships of trust.*

– PRSJ

The employment of positive and inclusive language can be showcased through PRSA and PR Council's approach:

*Advocacy: We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent. We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate...*

– PRSA

*Members of the PR Council (PRC) commit to standards of practice that assure clients, the public and media, employees, and business partners the highest level of professionalism and ethical conduct in every relationship with a PRC member. This commitment is a requirement for application and continued membership in the PRC.*

*Our overriding principle is that openness and transparency not only are in the public interest, they are also necessary tools for meeting our clients' objectives. Members of the PR Council embrace our responsibilities to promote open and transparent dialogue. We carry out our business in accordance with the following code of ethics and principles that guide our relationships with clients and the public.*

– PR Council

8. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics are written in a clear, positive and inclusive language in a way that promotes shared, voluntary commitment.

## Provisions

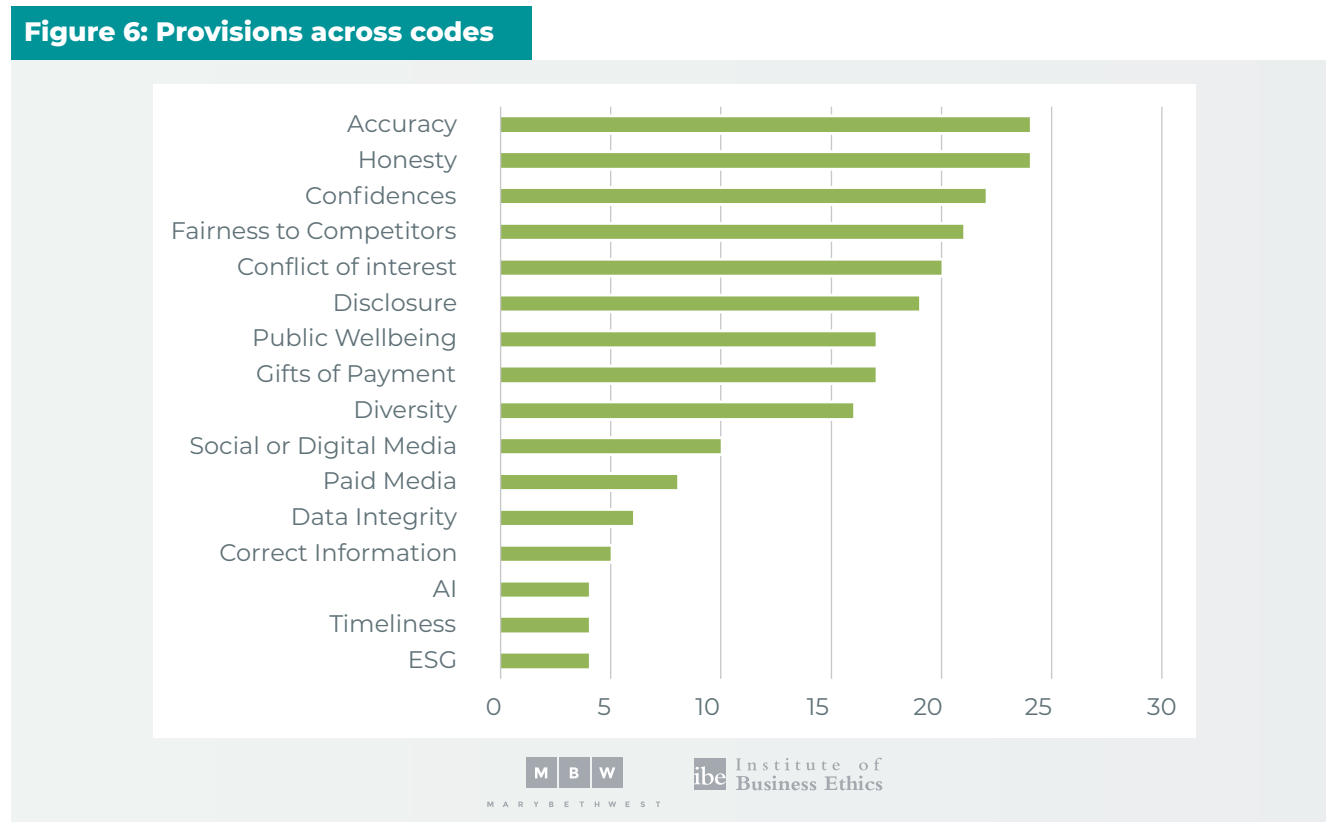
The provisions contained in codes of ethics are key to the effectiveness of the codes, as these are the actual guidelines that are provided to users. A number of associations provided their own code and supplemented it by other codes, such as GA, Code of Lisbon or country specific legislations. This analysis focuses on the codes published by the associations themselves. To assess the provisions, we began by analyzing the codes for a distinct set of provisions that was pre-agreed with PRCA. The most prevalent clauses, judged to be those found in at least 80% of the codes, are described as core provisions. Prevalent clauses which were not in the initial set of provisions but featured in various codes are also analyzed and presented.

## Initial Provisions

The core set of provisions agreed with PRCA were as follows:

<b>Honesty</b>	<b>Diversity or anti-discrimination provision</b>
<b>Informational accuracy and anti-disinformation</b>	<b>Paid media disclosure</b>
<b>Requirement to correct information publicly issued that is later deemed incorrect</b>	<b>Timeliness and responsiveness</b>
<b>Gifts or payments to news media</b>	<b>Managing confidences and confidential information</b>
<b>Fairness to competitors and / or colleagues</b>	<b>Managing and ensuring data integrity</b>
<b>Social or digital media integrity provision</b>	<b>Managing AI purposes and intent</b>
<b>Disclosure of client and interests represented</b>	<b>Balancing public wellbeing and third-party rights</b>
<b>Conflict of interest</b>	<b>ESG</b>

Figure 6 below demonstrates the frequency with which each of the provisions featured in the codes analyzed:



## The provisions which were included in more than 80% (n=19) of the codes were:

- Honesty and accuracy, which were present in all codes of ethics analyzed (n=24)
- Managing confidences and confidential information (n=22)
- The importance of fairness to competitors and/or colleagues (n=21)
- Conflict of interest (n=20)
- and disclosure of client and interests represented (n=19)

## The provisions that featured in less than 80% of the codes were:

- Balancing public wellbeing and third-party rights, which was mentioned specifically in seventeen codes (n=17). However, the spirit of this provision could be observed in the vast majority of codes, even when not mentioned specifically. This is a pillar on which all the codes analyzed were built.
- Provisions related to gifts or payments to news media, which were found in seventeen of the codes (n=17). Such provisions ranged from the formulation of policies for accepting and receiving gifts, to prohibition of gifts and payments for news media, whilst others were more generic and concerned the avoidance of deceptive practices.
- Diversity or anti-discrimination provisions, which were mentioned in sixteen codes (n=16). Two organizations have dedicated policies: PRSA – Working Toward a More Diverse Profession; and COM-ENT Kit for Non-Sexist Communication, which focuses on gender.
- Social or digital media integrity provisions, which were found in ten codes (n=10). Whilst this provision is not mainstream yet, its importance has been increasing. Particular associations provided additional guidance about social media through dedicated policies. Observed examples of such policies were PRII Guidelines on Engagement with Social Media Influencers, PRII Social Media Guidelines and PRINZ Guidelines for Online

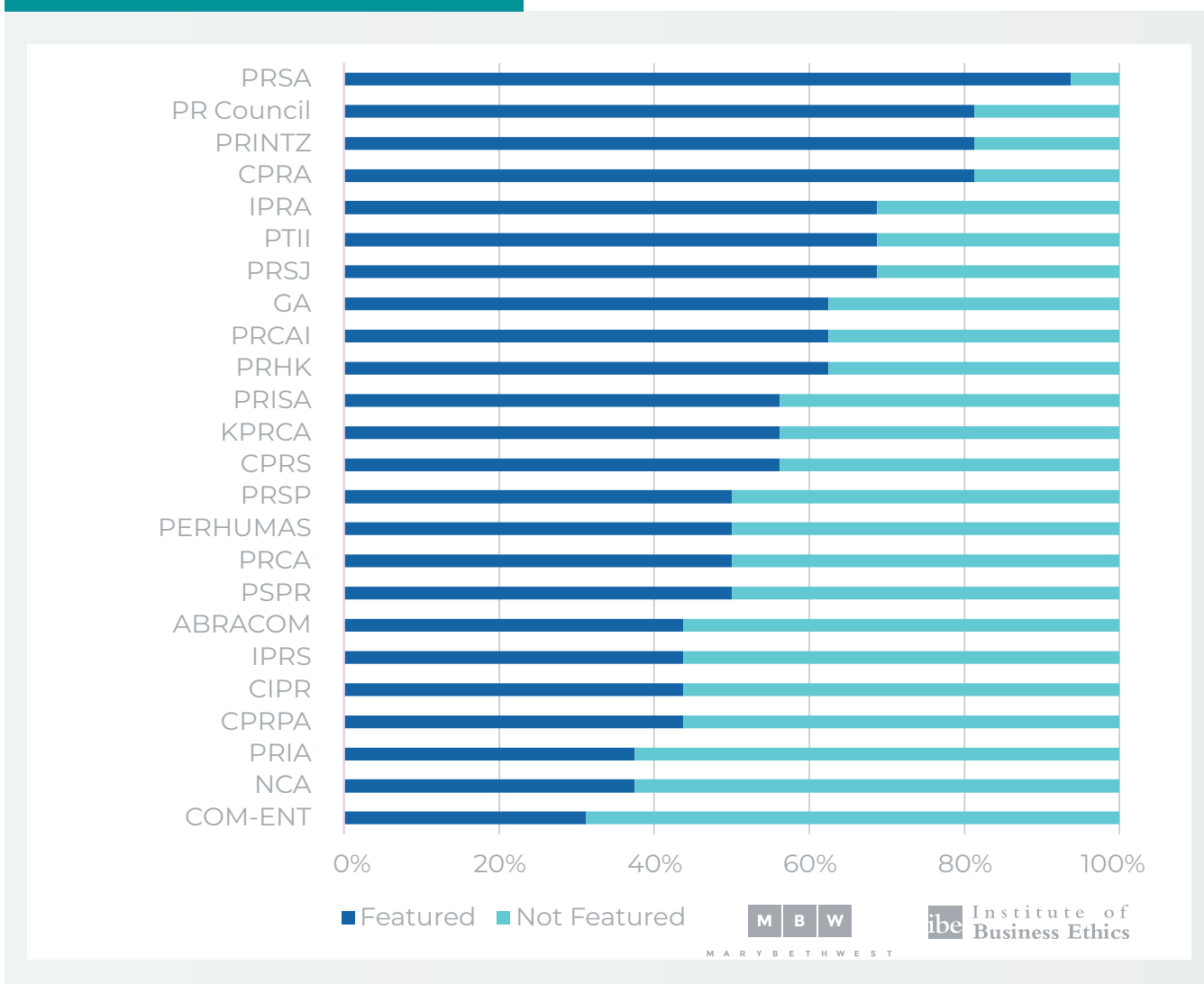
Engagement.

- The requirement to correct information publicly issued that is later deemed incorrect, is specifically highlighted by five (n=5) codes. This provision is closely related to informational accuracy and the latter may be understood to include the correction of information that is later deemed incorrect.
- Paid media disclosure was specifically mentioned in four (n=4) codes. However, it should be noted that there seemed to be an overlap between this provision and disclosure of client interests.
- Managing AI purposes and intent was mentioned in only four (n=4) codes. Whilst it was briefly mentioned or implied in two of these codes, the other two associations have dedicated policies, namely: PRSA – AI Leadership and Accountabilities; and CIPR – Artificial Intelligence Research and Resources for Communications Professionals.
- ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) as a term was not mentioned in any of the codes, although the Social and Governance aspects featured prominently in the ethos of all the codes. The importance of PR as a service to humanity demonstrates the Social aspect, Governance is highlighted in the statutes of all observed associations, whilst Environment was mentioned by three associations. ESG as a term has not yet garnered consensus on its definition and scope. However, it is a concept that is gaining momentum.
- Timeliness and responsiveness were mentioned in four codes (n=4), whilst managing and ensuring data integrity was mentioned in six (n=6). Such lack of mention does not necessarily demonstrate that these are not important provisions, but since most of the codes focused on the essential criteria, these may not be a strong priority.

The provisions included in 80% or more of the codes have been selected as the core provisions. In summary these provisions are honesty, accuracy, confidences, fairness to competitors, conflict of interest and disclosure. 33% (n=8) of codes lacked one or more of the core provisions.



**Figure 7: Provisions featured per code**



9. The IBE recommends that, at a minimum, PR associations include in their code of ethics the core provisions: honesty, accuracy, managing confidences, fairness to competitors, conflicts of interest and disclosure.

**Other provisions**

Bar a few similarities, codes of ethics analyzed were all original documents which choose different words for different provisions. However, several other provisions were noted in a number of codes. This section lists the most relevant ‘other’ provisions as well as sample wordings related to these provisions. Table 1 demonstrates the major ‘other’ provisions encountered, sample wording used and the number

of codes in which such provisions were observed. The relevance of the number of codes, is not the number itself but that it demonstrates the most widely accepted provisions. Associations might, in due course, be made aware of the other provisions that have been identified, in case they wish to consider including them in a revision of their code.

**Table 1: Other provisions**

Provision	Sample wording	Frequency
Anti-bribery	"Members shall personally accept no fees, commissions, gifts or any other considerations for professional services from anyone except employers or clients for whom the services were specifically performed." - CPRS	9
Personal capacity building	"We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships among a wide array of institutions and audiences." - PRSA	7
Do not over-promise	"[Do not] Guarantee the achievement of results, which are beyond the member's direct capacity to achieve or prevent." - PRCAI	6
Spirit and letter of the law	"... respect for the spirit as well as the letter of applicable laws" - GA	3
Accountability and independence	"We provide objective counsel to those we represent. We are accountable for our actions" - PRSA	3
Reputation by association	"We understand that in the environment in which we and our clients operate today, the behavior and standards of our clients, contractors, or business partners may reflect on our own organizations and our values. We recognize that we live in a time where a declaration of intentions is insufficient to maintain credibility and accountability. We understand that in many instances, our employees and the public may perceive us to be accountable by association for the decisions and choices of those with whom our firms are associated, even if we are unaware or not in any way responsible. As we would advise clients, we will take necessary steps to examine the quality of our relationships and values of those with whom we have business relationships." – PR Council	2
Prohibition of misrepresentation	"Members shall not misrepresent their status through misuse of title, grading or designation FPRIA, MPRIA or APRIA" – PRIA	1
Anti-manipulation	"Using any manipulative methods or techniques designed to create subconscious motivations which the individual cannot control of his own free will and so cannot be held accountable for the action taken on them" – PRII (Code of Athens)	1
Not engaging in anti-social forces.	"PR practitioners reject involvement with antisocial forces and exclude antisocial content. Examples of antisocial content PR Council 1. Activities, events and content produced by antisocial forces 2. Content that commends or idealizes criminal activities 3. Sexually explicit content 4. Expressions of discrimination 5. Content which disseminates false information to the public" – PRSJ	1
Enhancing the profession	"A member shall: acknowledge that there is an obligation to protect and enhance the profession." – PRSA	1
Keeping updated with the code	"Keep updated with the code - "1.2 Be expected to adhere to, understand and observe this code, any amendment to it, and any other codes which shall be incorporated into this code, and to remain up-to-date with the content and recommendations of any guidance or practice papers issued by the Association, and shall have a duty to conform to good practice as expressed in such guidance or practice papers." - PRCA	1
Development of employees	"Council members will also respect the personal rights of their employees and former employees. They will provide employees the necessary tools to serve their clients and opportunities to develop their professional skills. They will safeguard the privacy and handle with respect the professional reputation of current and former employees." – PR Council	1
Government relations	"We are conscientious stewards of taxpayer dollars. Working for federal, state and local governmental entities involves a unique responsibility as it is paid for by taxpayers' dollars and, like the rest of our work, must uphold the public trust at all times." – PR Council	1
Being aware of own limitations	[Translated] "Be aware of the limits of your own professional ability as well as ability team members and / or colleagues, and accept or delegate only the job that corresponds to the level of professional knowledge and experience of the executor" - CPRA	1

10. The IBE recommends that codes of ethics of PR associations include anti-bribery, personal capacity building, not over-promising, as well as personal accountability and responsibility.

## Enforcement of the codes

A feature of codes of ethics is their enforcement or otherwise by the organization publishing the code. The PR associations' codes of ethics were analyzed in terms of the requirement of acceptance of such codes by members, their enforcement, as well as whistle-blower and anti-retaliation structures built around enforcement practices.

The IBE analyzed whether the codes of ethics were a requirement for members. To do so, we took into consideration both the code of ethics and the membership forms. Five diverse categories emerged:

- **Required explicit** – almost half the associations (n=11) mention the requirement of acceptance of the code as part of membership, in the code itself
- **Required implicit** – a considerable proportion of associations (n=9) did not mention that adherence to the code of ethics is a requirement for membership, but this was implied either through enforcement of the code or through the membership form
- **Not mentioned** – (n=3) there was no reference of the applicability of the code for membership, either in the code itself or on the application form
- **Not applicable** – (n=1) as an association of associations, GA recommends that associations “require that individual members observe the ethical recommendations and behavioral requirements of the code”. This contrasts with IPRA which is also an association of associations but explicitly requires members to accept the code of ethics and enforces the code in part.

Whereas in 80% (n=20) of the associations adherence to the code is a requirement for membership, not all associations enforce the code. Of the twenty associations which listed adherence to the code as mandatory for members, three categories emerged:

- **Enforced** - (n=13) These associations were explicit on their enforcement of the code
- **Unenforced** - (n=1) Only PSPR explicitly explains that the code is not enforced and the rationale is: “Public relations employees, aware of the role of a high ethical level in the exercise of this profession, voluntarily adopt this Code and declare that in their work they will be guided by its provisions in order to create the best possible reputation of the public relations profession.” - PSPR

- **Not clear** – (n=6) These associations make no reference in relation to the enforcement of the code. For this reason, it is assumed that these codes are not enforced

As explained above, thirteen associations were explicit in their code being enforced. Differing levels of enforcement were observed. Most associations provide a granular level of detail regarding enforcement, including who can make a complaint, the setting up of panels or boards, and the actions that can be taken as a result of a hearing.

PRSA and IPRA take a semi-enforcement role. Whereas PRSA takes a stand that the code can be enforced in the case of legislative actions, IPRA places the responsibility of code observation on personal morality and responsibility. Their rationale can be observed below:

*Emphasis on enforcement of the Code has been eliminated. But, the PRSA Board of Directors retains the right to bar from membership or expel from the Society any individual who has been or is sanctioned by a government agency or convicted in a court of law of an action that fails to comply with the Code.*

*As a volunteer organization, PRSA's enforcement authority is limited. Organizations that have enforceable regulations, rules and procedures are empowered by higher authorities such as government or quasi- government organizations who can license or delegate the power to enforce and sanction. Some organizations with enforcement power gain that power from legislation or government executive authority. PRSA has no such legislative or government authorized sanctioning power nor is it likely to gain or seek such power.*

- PRSA

*Every PR practitioner should aspire to observe the principles which the Code elaborates. Each practitioner has to be free to interpret and apply their own standards of personal morality and conscience in observing them in their own cultural context.*

*IPRA is not a police force. Enforcement on IPRA members is according to an established disciplinary procedure. A complaint may be made by an IPRA member or anyone else with “appropriate standing”. The general concept is that anyone may complain but the procedure may dismiss a complaint if it is believed the complainant is not directly affected by the behavior of which they complain.*

- IPRA

It has been observed that 33% (n=8) of associations provided internal speak-up mechanisms. This healthy practice has been observed, although to a lesser degree, even in associations that do not enforce the code. The most common channels available for speaking up were email addresses, hotlines, post or contact persons.

The thirteen codes of ethics which were identified as enforceable were analyzed for efforts required to submit a complaint and those required to locate decisions and positions by committees in charge of enforcing the code.

The efforts required to submit a complaint were rated according to three categories:

**Easy** - (n=6) there was a dedicated webpage that contained all the information

**Available** - (n=3) provided a general contact of the association directly through the ethics webpage

**Difficult** - (n=4) provided a general contact of the association through other links within the website, most notably ‘Contact Us’ options.

### MAKING A COMPLAINT AGAINST A MEMBER

Anyone can bring a complaint against a member under the [Code of Conduct](#). This is an outline of how we [enforce the code](#) and manage complaints.

The process for making and hearing a complaint is governed by a set of [regulations](#).

[Download a guide to our complaints Process](#) (pdf).

For further information or advice on the CIPR Code of Conduct and the processes that support it, please contact:

Kevin Taylor Chart.PR, FCI PR, Regulatory Consultant [KevinT@cipr.co.uk](mailto:KevinT@cipr.co.uk)  
0207 631 6944

As an example of best practice, the screenshot below demonstrates how CIPR provided clear instructions and contact details for submitting a complaint:

The publication of decisions and positions by committees in charge of enforcing the code of ethics provides proof that committees take ethical misconduct seriously. The visibility given to decisions and positions by associations were rated according to three categories:

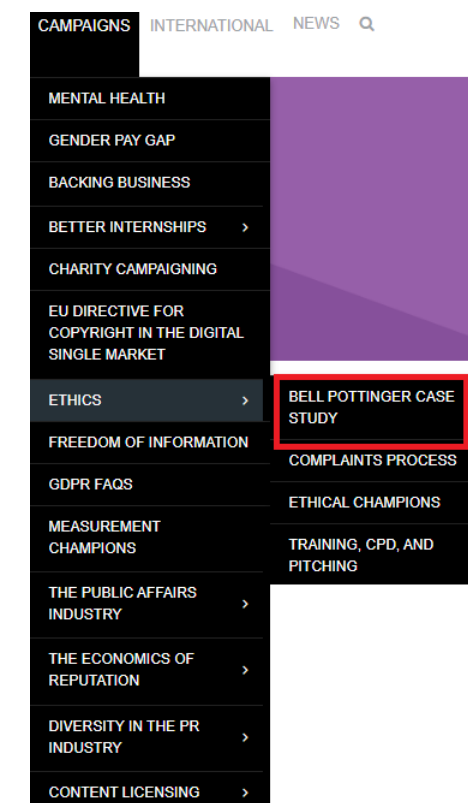
**Easy** - (n=4) there was a dedicated webpage that contained all the information

**Available** - (n=3) ethics webpage linked to external social media platforms and information may be made available together with other releases

**Difficult** - (n=6) ethics webpage did not contain links to external sources or past releases. These may be lost in the list of news articles that the organization issues.

Two examples of best practice in the area of visibility of decisions and positions follow:

1. The prominence given by PRCA to the Bell Pottinger Case Study:



2. The publication of the Court of Honor opinions and decisions on the Court of Honor webpage by CPRA:

### Opinions and decisions

- 16.03.2021. Recommendation · Transparency of the engagement of communication advisers in the election campaign for the 2021 local elections.
- 20.05.2020. Transparency of the engagement of communication advisers in the election campaign for the elections for Hr. cathedral
- 10.04.2019. Opinion of the Court of Honor concerning the candidature of a member of the Management Board in the elections to the European Parliament
- 06.06.2017. Qualified public relations professionals have a key role to play in building citizens' trust
- 05.07.2016. Opinion· Engagement of a pro bona advisor
- 05.07.2016. Decision on the application· Decision of the Court of HUOJ
- 07.06.2016. Opinion of the Court of Honor in the Grizzly Case
- 10.07.2015. The opinion of the Court is based on the report of Aleksandra Kolaric against Ivica Granic

Despite the enforcement of codes of ethics in thirteen associations, little importance is given to fair treatment of whistle-blowers and anti-retaliation provisions. Fair treatment of whistle-blowers was not mentioned in eleven of the codes. The other two codes, CPRA and PRIA, have a similar approach.

A complainant cannot act anonymously; however, following initial verification, anonymity of the complainant can be retained. None of the codes specifically provides a provision for anti-retaliation. Figure 8 below provides a visual representation of this:

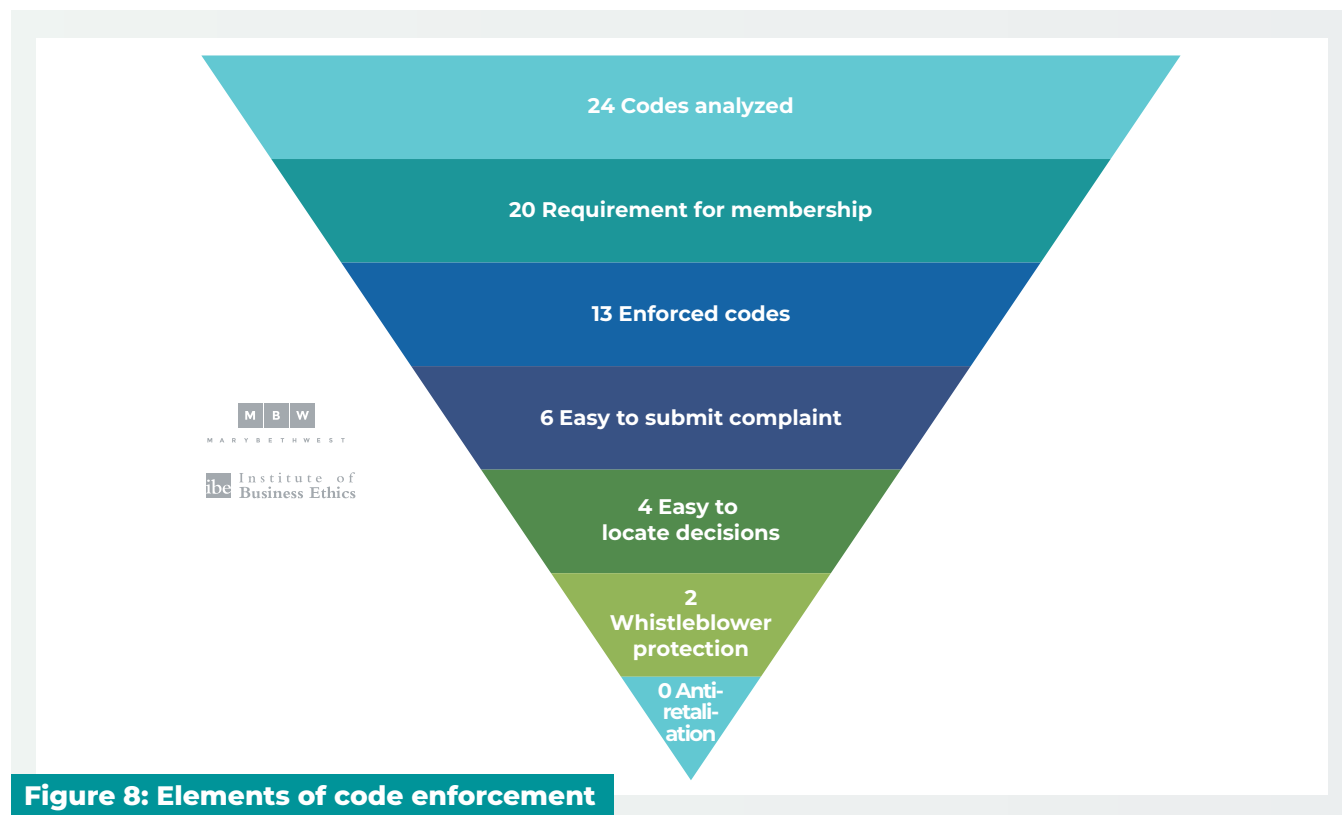


Figure 8: Elements of code enforcement

- 11. The IBE recommends that, although enforcement or lack of it are in the prerogative of an association:
  - it is important that the code of ethics sets out the position of the association clearly
  - in the case of associations which opt to enforce the code, due attention is given to the ease of submitting a complaint, the ease of locating decisions by the committee, the protection of whistle-blowers, as well as anti-retaliation
  - that no matter if the code is enforced, associations provide speak up channels which allow members to discuss ethical issues as they are encountered.

## Parting Thoughts

PR industry associations, practitioners, academicians, and students worldwide are invited to join a global conversation about ethical best-practices (#PRethics), during the public relations industry's Ethics Month in September of each year (as well as year-round).

Media interviews or speaking-engagement requests for Mary Beth West on the topic of PR industry ethics codes can be made by emailing Mary Beth West directly at MB@MaryBethWest.com.

Any organization interested in contracting high-quality, not-for-profit consultative expertise for revising and improving their existing ethics code or creating a new one is encouraged to contact either the Institute of Business Ethics in London (U.K.) or the Ethics & Compliance Initiative in Vienna, Virginia (U.S.):

### Institute of Business Ethics

24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1BE  
 United Kingdom  
 Telephone: +44 (0)20 7798 6040  
 Email: info@ibe.org.uk Website: www.ibe.org.uk

*"Since 1986, the IBE has advised organizations on how to strengthen their ethical culture by sharing knowledge and good practice, resulting in relationships with employees and stakeholders that are based on trust."*

### Ethics & Compliance Initiative

2650 Park Tower Drive, Suite 802  
 Vienna, VA 22180, United States of America  
 Telephone: +1-703-647-2185 Website: www.ethics.org

*"Established in 1922, the Ethics & Compliance Initiative™ (ECI™)...identifies the practices that improve ethics & compliance program effectiveness and build institutional culture strength. ... ECI also has an established track record of providing support to organizations seeking to transform their cultures, often in the wake of significant challenges with noncompliance."*

*in Memoriam*

**"Public expectations have changed fundamentally. What the public would accept a few years back, they won't accept now. They expect companies to have purpose rather than just to have profit. And the rise of social media means that stories simply don't go away. There is no place to hide. So the environment has been transformed. And that means that how PR practitioners operate needs to be transformed as well."**

– the late Francis Ingham, MPRCA, AMEC Global Summit, May 25, 2022, Vienna, Austria

**In respectful memory of Francis Ingham, MPRCA**  
 December 22, 1975 – March 16, 2023

**PRCA Director General: 2007 – March 16, 2023**  
 Founder, PRCA Global Ethics Council  
 2021 Recipient, AMEC Don Bartholomew Award



# About the Author



## Mary Beth West, APR, FPRCA

has served as a senior strategist for Fletcher Marketing PR in the United States since 2018 and has worked in the PR industry for nearly 30 years, including 15 years as an agency founder / employer. Her career focuses on advising leaders in matters of communication strategy, well-aligned policy development, pre- and post-crisis business continuity, and brand reputation.

Mary Beth was the sole sponsor of this IBE ethics code study, with a grant donated directly by Mary Beth to the IBE for its scope of work.

Her philanthropic interests in service to the PR sector and workforce development are significant – with scores of regional and national scholarships funded over decades. Her other current projects include funding the Ethics & Compliance Initiative’s Business Integrity Library (a searchable online database of ESG best-practices from among the world’s 100 largest corporations) and a community-college campaign providing resources in her local market in Tennessee to recruit economically disadvantaged, diverse students to wide-ranging career pathways in communication-related fields, through a coordinated effort in public school systems.

Mary Beth can be followed on X (Twitter) at [@MaryBethWest](#) and on LinkedIn, and contacted directly, [MB@MaryBethWest.com](mailto:MB@MaryBethWest.com).