

# Competence, a question of self-management skills as well (Part 2)

**A**n engineer's competence is threefold: knowledge, know-how and self-management skills. While knowledge and know-how are generally well assimilated, self-management skills are often misunderstood, even neglected, by some engineers. In our previous article, we saw that the *Professional Code and the Code of ethics of engineers* dictate that engineers carry out their professional activities with collaboration, respect and good faith, namely in their professional relationships with their colleagues. What about relationships with clients? Why are honour and dignity associated with the profession? If one lacks self-management skills, what can that entail?

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS

The Code of ethics of engineers includes several provisions relating to engineers' obligation to inform and counsel their clients. We could dedicate an entire article to the many aspects of this ethical duty. However, in terms of self-management skills and the attitudes one should adopt, we wish to emphasize that the engineer's relationship with a client must be guided by transparency, availability and effective communication.

Clients have the right to understand and appreciate the services rendered to them by engineers<sup>1</sup>. They also have the right to expect that engineers will return their calls in a timely fashion as well as respect deadlines, unless special circumstances arise<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, misrepresenting one's level of competence or means at one's disposal<sup>3</sup>, disguising one's errors<sup>4</sup> or concealing a situation of conflict of interest<sup>5</sup> are derogatory behaviours. Forcefully or repeatedly inciting someone to make use of one's professional services also constitutes a derogatory act<sup>6</sup>. Engineers must respect the individual's freedom of choice.

Finally, even though the chances of lending oneself to sexual misconduct are less likely in engineering as they perhaps might be in healthy related professions, section 59.1 of the *Professional Code* does not make any distinction between various professions. Consequently, throughout the engineer's entire relationship with a client, it is forbidden to abuse of such relationship and engage in sexual relations, make abusive acts of a sexual nature or carry on inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature with the client.

## HONOUR AND DIGNITY

The notion that engineers have to act respectfully and responsibly is not new. Historically, professional practice has been

associated with honour and respect. It is considered a privilege one must earn and every professional must be worthy of it.

Thus, engineers must act in a way that inspires confidence. They must refrain from behaving in a way that may besmirch or compromise such confidence or the credibility of the profession. It is expected, among other things, that engineers maintain relationships that are imbued with respect, courtesy, moderation and objectivity. Engineers must act accordingly with everyone involved in a project or mandate and more generally with everyone they meet as they carry out their professional activities as well as with representatives of the Ordre.

Engineers who fail to do so could face a disciplinary hearing and possibly sanctions, even though a lack of respect, courtesy, moderation or objectivity is not expressly prohibited<sup>7</sup>. In fact, an act which, according to the Ordre's Disciplinary Council, is derogatory to the honour, dignity or discipline of the profession may be sanctioned pursuant to section 59.2 of the Professional Code.

Engineers will violate this section if their actions adversely affect the reputation of the profession as a whole or if they undermine the very essence of the profession. The Disciplinary Council has sanctioned the following behaviours, pursuant to this provision:

- Having uttered offensive remarks with respect to an employee of the Régie du bâtiment<sup>8</sup>;
- Having threatened a Transports Québec representative, during a work site meeting<sup>9</sup>;
- Having made a false statement or misrepresentation to an investigator responsible for monitoring unlawful practice<sup>10</sup>;
- Having made inappropriate, condescending, aggressive and/or blasphemous remarks to a colleague or with respect to the Ordre<sup>11</sup>.

## SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS, A GUARANTEE OF CREDIBILITY

Aside from one's technical abilities, the quality of one's professional services and a mandate's success can depend on the quality of one's interpersonal relationships, namely the capacity to:

- Adapt to a situation or a context in the workplace;
- Demonstrate insight and open-mindedness;
- Collaborate;
- Communicate effectively;
- Provide a positive influence through one's leadership.

Over and above ensuring that ethical obligations are respected, self-management skills are a pledge for credibility. Attitudes and interpersonal abilities contribute greatly to establishing one's credibility and reputation where engineers carry out their professional activities. At the end of the day, the soft-management skills engineers use on a daily basis will allow them to develop and maintain trust in their relationships. Engineers can then ensure that their professionalism is recognized to its full value, providing them with a stepping stone to a fulfilling career.

1. Sections 3.03.02 and 3.03.03 of the Code of ethics of engineers (the "Code")
2. Section 3.03.01 of the Code.
3. Section 3.02.02 of the Code.
4. Namely section 3.02.05 of the Code.
5. Section 3.05.04 of the Code.
6. Section 4.01.01 (b) of the Code. For example, the Disciplinary Council ordered sanctions in cases where engineers repeatedly and aggressively solicited municipal counsellors urging them to retain their engineering firms for professional services: *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Bourdages*, CDOIQ 22-95-0007 and *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Michaud*, CDOIQ 22-95-0013.
7. The Code of ethics of engineers does not contain a general obligation of that nature. Nine professional orders have adopted a provision to that effect in their code of ethics: acupuncturists, land surveyors, lawyers, chemists, human resources and industrial relations advisors, accredited appraisers, geologists, veterinarians and medical technicians.
8. *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Paré*, CDOIQ 22-02-0268, Professions Tribunal (750-07-000002-068) November 17, 2007.
9. *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Babin*, CDOIQ 22-11-0385.
10. *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Fortin*, CDOIQ 22-07-0355.
11. *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Truong*, CDOIQ 22-11-0391; *Ingénieurs (Ordre professionnel des) v. Prigent*, 22-06-0334.