

*Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants*  
*Chapter A*

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# Revisions to the Code to Promote the Role and Mindset Expected of Professional Accountants

This pronouncement only includes areas in the Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (Revised 2018)(Code) requiring revisions, without re-producing the entire Code. In this pronouncement, additions or deletions to the extant Code are underlined or strikethrough; texts in the extant Code relocated to another location are double-underlined or double-strikethrough.



Hong Kong Institute of  
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# REVISIONS TO THE CODE TO PROMOTE THE ROLE AND MINDSET EXPECTED OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

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## MARK-UP FROM EXTANT VERSION

### PART 1 – COMPLYING WITH THE CODE, FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### SECTION 100

#### COMPLYING WITH THE CODE

##### Introduction~~General~~

100.1-A4 A distinguishing mark of the accountancy profession is its acceptance of the responsibility to act in the public interest. ~~A professional accountant's responsibility is not exclusively to satisfy the needs of an individual client or employing organization. Therefore, the Code contains requirements and application material to enable professional accountants to meet their responsibility to act in the public interest.~~

100.2 Confidence in the accountancy profession is a reason why businesses, governments and other organizations involve professional accountants in a broad range of areas, including financial and corporate reporting, assurance and other professional activities. Accountants understand and acknowledge that such confidence is based on the skills and values that accountants bring to the professional activities they undertake, including:

- (a) Adherence to ethical principles and professional standards;
- (b) Use of business acumen;
- (c) Application of expertise on technical and other matters; and
- (d) Exercise of professional judgment.

The application of these skills and values enables accountants to provide advice or other output that meets the purpose for which it was provided, and which can be relied upon by the intended users of such output.

100.3 Pursuant to section 18A of the Professional Accountants Ordinance, the Institute's Council may, in relation to the practice of accountancy, issue or specify any statement of professional ethics required to be observed, maintained or otherwise applied by members of HKICPA (members). The Code sets out high quality standards of ethical behavior expected of professional accountants.

100.4 The Code establishes five fundamental principles to be complied with by all professional accountants. It also includes a conceptual framework that sets out the approach to be taken to identify, evaluate and address threats to compliance with those fundamental principles and, for audits and other assurance engagements, threats to independence. The Code also applies the fundamental principles and the conceptual framework to a range of facts and circumstances that accountants might encounter, whether in business or in public practice.

##### Requirements and Application Material

100.52 A1 The requirements in the Code, designated with the letter "R," impose obligations.

100.52 A2 Application material, designated with the letter "A," provides context, explanations, suggestions for actions or matters to consider, illustrations and other guidance relevant to a proper understanding of the Code. In particular, the application

material is intended to help a professional accountant to understand how to apply the conceptual framework to a particular set of circumstances and to understand and comply with a specific requirement. While such application material does not of itself impose a requirement, consideration of the material is necessary to the proper application of the requirements of the Code, including application of the conceptual framework.

~~R100.63~~ A professional accountant shall comply with the Code. ~~There might be circumstances where laws or regulations preclude an accountant from complying with certain parts of the Code. In such circumstances, those laws and regulations prevail, and the accountant shall comply with all other parts of the Code.~~

~~100.6 A1~~ Upholding the fundamental principles and compliance with the specific requirements of the Code enable professional accountants to meet their responsibility to act in the public interest.

~~100.6 A2~~ Complying with the Code includes giving appropriate regard to the aim and intent of the specific requirements.

~~100.6 A3~~ Compliance with the requirements of the Code does not mean that professional accountants will have always met their responsibility to act in the public interest. There might be unusual or exceptional circumstances in which an accountant believes that complying with a requirement or requirements of the Code might not be in the public interest or would lead to a disproportionate outcome. In those circumstances, the accountant is encouraged to consult with an appropriate body such as a professional or regulatory body.

~~100.6 A4~~ In acting in the public interest, a professional accountant's considers not only the preferences or requirements responsibility is not exclusively to satisfy the needs of an individual client or employing organization, but also the interests of other stakeholders when performing professional activities. Therefore, the Code contains requirements and application material to enable professional accountants to meet their responsibility to act in the public interest.

~~R100.7~~ There might be there are circumstances where laws or regulations preclude an professional accountant from complying with certain parts of the Code. In such circumstances, those laws and regulations prevail, and the accountant shall comply with all other parts of the Code.

~~100.73~~ A1 The principle of professional behavior requires a professional accountant to comply with relevant laws and regulations. Some jurisdictions might have provisions that differ from or go beyond those set out in the Code. Accountants in those jurisdictions need to be aware of those differences and comply with the more stringent provisions unless prohibited by law or regulation.

~~100.3 A2~~ A professional accountant might encounter unusual circumstances in which the accountant believes that the result of applying a specific requirement of the Code would be disproportionate or might not be in the public interest. In those circumstances, the accountant is encouraged to consult with a professional or regulatory body.

**Breaches of the Code**

**R100.84** Paragraphs R400.80 to R400.89 and R900.50 to R900.55 address a breach of *Independence Standards*. A professional accountant who identifies a breach of any other provision of the Code shall evaluate the significance of the breach and its impact on the accountant's ability to comply with the fundamental principles. The accountant shall also:

- (a) Take whatever actions might be available, as soon as possible, to address the consequences of the breach satisfactorily; and
- (b) Determine whether to report the breach to the relevant parties.

100.84 A1 Relevant parties to whom such a breach might be reported include those who might have been affected by it, a professional or regulatory body or an oversight authority.

## SECTION 110

### THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

#### General

- 110.1 A1 There are five fundamental principles of ethics for professional accountants:
- (a) Integrity – to be straightforward and honest in all professional and business relationships.
  - (b) Objectivity – ~~not to compromise~~exercise professional or business judgments without being compromised by~~because of~~:
    - (i) ~~b~~Bias;
    - (ii) ~~e~~Conflict of interest; or
    - (iii) ~~u~~Undue influence of others, or undue reliance on, individuals, organizations, technology or other factors.
  - (c) Professional Competence and Due Care – to:
    - (i) Attain and maintain professional knowledge and skill at the level required to ensure that a client or employing organization receives competent professional service, based on current technical and professional standards and relevant legislation; and
    - (ii) Act diligently and in accordance with applicable technical and professional standards.
  - (d) Confidentiality – to respect the confidentiality of information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships.
  - (e) Professional Behavior – to:
    - (i) ~~e~~Comply with relevant laws and regulations~~and~~;
    - (ii) Behave in a manner consistent with the profession's responsibility to act in the public interest in all professional activities and business relationships; and
    - (iii) ~~a~~Avoid any conduct that the professional accountant knows or should know might discredit the profession.
- R110.2** A professional accountant shall comply with each of the fundamental principles.
- 110.2 A1 The fundamental principles of ethics establish the standard of behavior expected of a professional accountant. The conceptual framework establishes the approach which an accountant is required to apply ~~to assist~~ in complying with those fundamental principles. Subsections 111 to 115 set out requirements and application material related to each of the fundamental principles.

110.2 A2 A professional accountant might face a situation in which complying with one fundamental principle conflicts with complying with one or more other fundamental principles. In such a situation, the accountant might consider consulting, on an anonymous basis if necessary, with:

- Others within the firm or employing organization.
- Those charged with governance.
- A professional body.
- A regulatory body.
- Legal counsel.

However, such consultation does not relieve the accountant from the responsibility to exercise professional judgment to resolve the conflict or, if necessary, and unless prohibited by law or regulation, disassociate from the matter creating the conflict.

110.2 A3 The professional accountant is encouraged to document the substance of the issue, the details of any discussions, the decisions made and the rationale for those decisions.

## **SUBSECTION 111 – INTEGRITY**

**R111.1** A professional accountant shall comply with the principle of integrity, which requires an accountant to be straightforward and honest in all professional and business relationships.

111.1 A1 Integrity ~~implies~~ involves fair dealing ~~and~~, truthfulness ~~and~~ having the strength of character to act appropriately, even when facing pressure to do otherwise or when doing so might create potential adverse personal or organizational consequences.

111.1 A2 Acting appropriately involves:

(a) Standing one's ground when confronted by dilemmas and difficult situations;  
or

(b) Challenging others as and when circumstances warrant,

in a manner appropriate to the circumstances.

**R111.2** A professional accountant shall not knowingly be associated with reports, returns, communications or other information where the accountant believes that the information:

- (a) Contains a materially false or misleading statement;
- (b) Contains statements or information provided recklessly; or
- (c) Omits or obscures required information where such omission or obscurity would be misleading.

111.2 A1 If a professional accountant provides a modified report in respect of such a report, return, communication or other information, the accountant is not in breach of paragraph R111.2.

- R111.3** When a professional accountant becomes aware of having been associated with information described in paragraph R111.2, the accountant shall take steps to be disassociated from that information.

### **SUBSECTION 112 – OBJECTIVITY**

- R112.1** A professional accountant shall comply with the principle of objectivity, which requires an accountant ~~not to compromise~~exercise professional or business judgment without being compromised by~~because of~~:

- (a) ~~b~~Bias;
- (b) ~~e~~Conflict of interest; or
- (c) ~~u~~Undue influence of others, or undue reliance on, individuals, organizations, technology or other factors.

- R112.2** A professional accountant shall not undertake a professional activity if a circumstance or relationship unduly influences the accountant's professional judgment regarding that activity.

### **SUBSECTION 113 – PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND DUE CARE**

- R113.1** A professional accountant shall comply with the principle of professional competence and due care, which requires an accountant to:

- (a) Attain and maintain professional knowledge and skill at the level required to ensure that a client or employing organization receives competent professional service, based on current technical and professional standards and relevant legislation; and
- (b) Act diligently and in accordance with applicable technical and professional standards.

- 113.1 A1 Serving clients and employing organizations with professional competence requires the exercise of sound judgment in applying professional knowledge and skill when undertaking professional activities.

- 113.1 A2 Maintaining professional competence requires a continuing awareness and an understanding of relevant technical, professional ~~and~~, business and technology-related developments. Continuing professional development enables a professional accountant to develop and maintain the capabilities to perform competently within the professional environment.

- 113.1 A3 Diligence encompasses the responsibility to act in accordance with the requirements of an assignment, carefully, thoroughly and on a timely basis.

- R113.2** In complying with the principle of professional competence and due care, a professional accountant shall take reasonable steps to ensure that those working in a professional capacity under the accountant's authority have appropriate training and supervision.

- R113.3** Where appropriate, a professional accountant shall make clients, the employing organization, or other users of the accountant's professional services or activities, aware of the limitations inherent in the services or activities.

## **SUBSECTION 114 – CONFIDENTIALITY**

**R114.1** A professional accountant shall comply with the principle of confidentiality, which requires an accountant to respect the confidentiality of information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships. An accountant shall:

- (a) Be alert to the possibility of inadvertent disclosure, including in a social environment, and particularly to a close business associate or an immediate or a close family member;
- (b) Maintain confidentiality of information within the firm or employing organization;
- (c) Maintain confidentiality of information disclosed by a prospective client or employing organization;
- (d) Not disclose confidential information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships outside the firm or employing organization without proper and specific authority, unless there is a legal or professional duty or right to disclose;
- (e) Not use confidential information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships for the personal advantage of the accountant or for the advantage of a third party;
- (f) Not use or disclose any confidential information, either acquired or received as a result of a professional or business relationship, after that relationship has ended; and
- (g) Take reasonable steps to ensure that personnel under the accountant's control, and individuals from whom advice and assistance are obtained, respect the accountant's duty of confidentiality.

**114.1 A1** Confidentiality serves the public interest because it facilitates the free flow of information from the professional accountant's client or employing organization to the accountant in the knowledge that the information will not be disclosed to a third party. Nevertheless, the following are circumstances where professional accountants are or might be required to disclose confidential information or when such disclosure might be appropriate:

- (a) Disclosure is required by law, for example:
  - (i) Production of documents or other provision of evidence in the course of legal proceedings; or
  - (ii) Disclosure to the appropriate public authorities of infringements of the law that come to light;
- (b) Disclosure is permitted by law and is authorized by the client or the employing organization; and
- (c) There is a professional duty or right to disclose, when not prohibited by law:
  - (i) To comply with the quality review of a professional body;
  - (ii) To respond to an inquiry or investigation by a professional or regulatory body;
  - (iii) To protect the professional interests of a professional accountant in legal proceedings; or

- (iv) To comply with technical and professional standards, including ethics requirements.

114.1 A2 In deciding whether to disclose confidential information, factors to consider, depending on the circumstances, include:

- Whether the interests of any parties, including third parties whose interests might be affected, could be harmed if the client or employing organization consents to the disclosure of information by the professional accountant.
- Whether all the relevant information is known and substantiated, to the extent practicable. Factors affecting the decision to disclose include:
  - Unsubstantiated facts.
  - Incomplete information.
  - Unsubstantiated conclusions.
- The proposed type of communication, and to whom it is addressed.
- Whether the parties to whom the communication is addressed are appropriate recipients.

**R114.2** A professional accountant shall continue to comply with the principle of confidentiality even after the end of the relationship between the accountant and a client or employing organization. When changing employment or acquiring a new client, the accountant is entitled to use prior experience but shall not use or disclose any confidential information acquired or received as a result of a professional or business relationship.

***Additional requirements are set out in Section 400 “Unlawful Acts or Defaults by Clients of Members” and Section 500 “Unlawful Acts or Defaults by or on Behalf of a Member’s Employer” under Chapter C of the Code.***

## **SUBSECTION 115 – PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR**

**R115.1** A professional accountant shall comply with the principle of professional behavior, which requires an accountant to:

- (a)** ~~Comply with relevant laws and regulations and;~~
- (b)** Behave in a manner consistent with the profession’s responsibility to act in the public interest in all professional activities and business relationships;  
and
- (c)** ~~Avoid any conduct that the accountant knows or should know might discredit the profession.~~

A professional accountant shall not knowingly engage in any business, occupation or activity that impairs or might impair the integrity, objectivity or good reputation of the profession, and as a result would be incompatible with the fundamental principles.

115.1 A1 Conduct that might discredit the profession includes conduct that a reasonable and informed third party would be likely to conclude adversely affects the good reputation of the profession.

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- R115.2** When undertaking marketing or promotional activities, a professional accountant shall not bring the profession into disrepute. A professional accountant shall be honest and truthful and shall not make:
- (a)** Exaggerated claims for the services offered by, or the qualifications or experience of, the accountant; or
  - (b)** Disparaging references or unsubstantiated comparisons to the work of others.
- 115.2 A1 If a professional accountant is in doubt about whether a form of advertising or marketing is appropriate, the accountant is encouraged to consult with the relevant professional body.

***Additional requirements are set out in Section 800 “Use of Designations and Institute’s Logo” and Section 900 “Practice Promotion” under Chapter C of the Code.***

## SECTION 120

### THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

- 120.1 The circumstances in which professional accountants operate might create threats to compliance with the fundamental principles. Section 120 sets out requirements and application material, including a conceptual framework, to assist accountants in complying with the fundamental principles and meeting their responsibility to act in the public interest. Such requirements and application material accommodate the wide range of facts and circumstances, including the various professional activities, interests and relationships, that create threats to compliance with the fundamental principles. In addition, they deter accountants from concluding that a situation is permitted solely because that situation is not specifically prohibited by the Code.
- 120.2 The conceptual framework specifies an approach for a professional accountant to:
- (a) Identify threats to compliance with the fundamental principles;
  - (b) Evaluate the threats identified; and
  - (c) Address the threats by eliminating or reducing them to an acceptable level.

#### Requirements and Application Material

##### General

- R120.3** The professional accountant shall apply the conceptual framework to identify, evaluate and address threats to compliance with the fundamental principles set out in Section 110.
- 120.3 A1 Additional requirements and application material that are relevant to the application of the conceptual framework are set out in:
- (a) Part 2 – *Professional Accountants in Business*;
  - (b) Part 3 – *Professional Accountants in Public Practice*; and
  - (c) *Independence Standards*, as follows:
    - (i) Part 4A – *Independence for Audit and Review Engagements*; and
    - (ii) Part 4B – *Independence for Assurance Engagements Other than Audit and Review Engagements*.
- R120.4** When dealing with an ethics issue, the professional accountant shall consider the context in which the issue has arisen or might arise. Where an individual who is a professional accountant in public practice is performing professional activities pursuant to the accountant's relationship with the firm, whether as a contractor, employee or owner, the individual shall comply with the provisions in Part 2 that apply to these circumstances.

- R120.5** When applying the conceptual framework, the professional accountant shall:
- (a)** Have an inquiring mind;
  - (ab)** Exercise professional judgment; and
  - ~~**(b)** Remain alert for new information and to changes in facts and circumstances;~~  
~~and~~
  - (c)** Use the reasonable and informed third party test described in paragraph 120.5 A64.

*Having an Inquiring Mind*

120.5 A12 An inquiring mind is a prerequisite to obtaining ~~An~~ understanding of known facts and circumstances ~~is a prerequisite to necessary~~ for the proper application of the conceptual framework. ~~Determining the actions necessary to obtain this understanding and coming to a conclusion about whether the fundamental principles have been complied with also require the exercise of professional judgment.~~ Having an inquiring mind involves:

- (a) Considering the source, relevance and sufficiency of information obtained, taking into account the nature, scope and outputs of the professional activity being undertaken; and
- (b) Being open and alert to a need for further investigation or other action.

120.5 A2 When considering the source, relevance and sufficiency of information obtained, the professional accountant might consider, among other matters, whether:

- New information has emerged or there have been changes in facts and circumstances.
- The information or its source might be influenced by bias or self-interest.
- There is reason to be concerned that potentially relevant information might be missing from the facts and circumstances known to the accountant.
- There is an inconsistency between the known facts and circumstances and the accountant's expectations.
- The information provides a reasonable basis on which to reach a conclusion.
- There might be other reasonable conclusions that could be reached from the ~~available~~ information obtained.

120.5 A3 Paragraph R120.5 requires all professional accountants to have an inquiring mind when identifying, evaluating and addressing threats to the fundamental principles. This prerequisite for applying the conceptual framework applies to all accountants regardless of the professional activity undertaken. Under auditing, review and other assurance standards, including those issued by the IAASB, accountants are also required to exercise professional skepticism, which includes a critical assessment of evidence.

*Exercising of Professional Judgment*

120.5 A44 Professional judgment involves the application of relevant training, professional knowledge, skill and experience commensurate with the facts and circumstances,

~~including~~ taking into account the nature and scope of the particular professional activities, and the interests and relationships involved.

~~120.5 A5~~ ~~In relation to undertaking professional activities, the exercise of p~~Professional judgment is required when the professional accountant applies the conceptual framework in order to make informed decisions about the courses of actions available, and to determine whether such decisions are appropriate in the circumstances. In making this determination, the accountant might consider matters such as whether:

~~120.5 A3~~ ~~In exercising professional judgment to obtain this understanding, the professional accountant might consider, among other matters, whether:~~

- There is reason to be concerned that potentially relevant information might be missing from the facts and circumstances known to the accountant.
- ~~There is an inconsistency between the known facts and circumstances and the accountant's expectations.~~
- The accountant's expertise and experience are sufficient to reach a conclusion.
- There is a need to consult with others with relevant expertise or experience.
- ~~The information provides a reasonable basis on which to reach a conclusion.~~
- The accountant's own preconception or bias might be affecting the accountant's exercise of professional judgment.
- ~~There might be other reasonable conclusions that could be reached from the available information.~~

#### *Reasonable and Informed Third Party*

120.5 A64 The reasonable and informed third party test is a consideration by the professional accountant about whether the same conclusions would likely be reached by another party. Such consideration is made from the perspective of a reasonable and informed third party, who weighs all the relevant facts and circumstances that the accountant knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, at the time the conclusions are made. The reasonable and informed third party does not need to be an accountant, but would possess the relevant knowledge and experience to understand and evaluate the appropriateness of the accountant's conclusions in an impartial manner.

#### **Identifying Threats**

**R120.6** The professional accountant shall identify threats to compliance with the fundamental principles.

120.6 A1 An understanding of the facts and circumstances, including any professional activities, interests and relationships that might compromise compliance with the fundamental principles, is a prerequisite to the professional accountant's identification of threats to such compliance. The existence of certain conditions, policies and procedures established by the profession, legislation, regulation, the firm, or the employing organization that can enhance the accountant acting ethically might also help identify threats to compliance with the fundamental principles. Paragraph 120.8 A2 includes general examples of such conditions, policies and procedures which are also factors that are relevant in evaluating the level of threats.

- 120.6 A2 Threats to compliance with the fundamental principles might be created by a broad range of facts and circumstances. It is not possible to define every situation that creates threats. In addition, the nature of engagements and work assignments might differ and, consequently, different types of threats might be created.
- 120.6 A3 Threats to compliance with the fundamental principles fall into one or more of the following categories:
- (a) Self-interest threat – the threat that a financial or other interest will inappropriately influence a professional accountant’s judgment or behavior;
  - (b) Self-review threat – the threat that a professional accountant will not appropriately evaluate the results of a previous judgment made<sub>1</sub>, or an activity performed by the accountant<sub>7</sub>, or by another individual within the accountant’s firm or employing organization, on which the accountant will rely when forming a judgment as part of performing a current activity;
  - (c) Advocacy threat – the threat that a professional accountant will promote a client’s or employing organization’s position to the point that the accountant’s objectivity is compromised;
  - (d) Familiarity threat – the threat that due to a long or close relationship with a client, or employing organization, a professional accountant will be too sympathetic to their interests or too accepting of their work; and
  - (e) Intimidation threat – the threat that a professional accountant will be deterred from acting objectively because of actual or perceived pressures, including attempts to exercise undue influence over the accountant.
- 120.6 A4 A circumstance might create more than one threat, and a threat might affect compliance with more than one fundamental principle.

### **Evaluating Threats**

- R120.7** When the professional accountant identifies a threat to compliance with the fundamental principles, the accountant shall evaluate whether such a threat is at an acceptable level.

#### *Acceptable Level*

- 120.7 A1 An acceptable level is a level at which a professional accountant using the reasonable and informed third party test would likely conclude that the accountant complies with the fundamental principles.

#### *Factors Relevant in Evaluating the Level of Threats*

- 120.8 A1 The consideration of qualitative as well as quantitative factors is relevant in the professional accountant’s evaluation of threats, as is the combined effect of multiple threats, if applicable.
- 120.8 A2 The existence of conditions, policies and procedures described in paragraph 120.6 A1 might also be factors that are relevant in evaluating the level of threats to compliance with the fundamental principles. Examples of such conditions, policies and procedures include:
- Corporate governance requirements.
  - Educational, training and experience requirements for the profession.

- Effective complaint systems which enable the professional accountant and the general public to draw attention to unethical behavior.
- An explicitly stated duty to report breaches of ethics requirements.
- Professional or regulatory monitoring and disciplinary procedures.

*Consideration of New Information or Changes in Facts and Circumstances*

**R120.9** If the professional accountant becomes aware of new information or changes in facts and circumstances that might impact whether a threat has been eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level, the accountant shall re-evaluate and address that threat accordingly.

120.9 A1 Remaining alert throughout the professional activity assists the professional accountant in determining whether new information has emerged or changes in facts and circumstances have occurred that:

- (a) Impact the level of a threat; or
- (b) Affect the accountant's conclusions about whether safeguards applied continue to be appropriate to address identified threats.

120.9 A2 If new information results in the identification of a new threat, the professional accountant is required to evaluate and, as appropriate, address this threat. (Ref: Paras. R120.7 and R120.10).

**Addressing Threats**

**R120.10** If the professional accountant determines that the identified threats to compliance with the fundamental principles are not at an acceptable level, the accountant shall address the threats by eliminating them or reducing them to an acceptable level. The accountant shall do so by:

- (a) Eliminating the circumstances, including interests or relationships, that are creating the threats;
- (b) Applying safeguards, where available and capable of being applied, to reduce the threats to an acceptable level; or
- (c) Declining or ending the specific professional activity.

*Actions to Eliminate Threats*

120.10 A1 Depending on the facts and circumstances, a threat might be addressed by eliminating the circumstance creating the threat. However, there are some situations in which threats can only be addressed by declining or ending the specific professional activity. This is because the circumstances that created the threats cannot be eliminated and safeguards are not capable of being applied to reduce the threat to an acceptable level.

*Safeguards*

120.10 A2 Safeguards are actions, individually or in combination, that the professional accountant takes that effectively reduce threats to compliance with the fundamental principles to an acceptable level.

*Consideration of Significant Judgments Made and Overall Conclusions Reached*

**R120.11** The professional accountant shall form an overall conclusion about whether the actions that the accountant takes, or intends to take, to address the threats created will eliminate those threats or reduce them to an acceptable level. In forming the overall conclusion, the accountant shall:

- (a) Review any significant judgments made or conclusions reached; and
- (b) Use the reasonable and informed third party test.

**Other Considerations when Applying the Conceptual Framework**

Bias

120.12 A1 Conscious or unconscious bias affects the exercise of professional judgment when identifying, evaluating and addressing threats to compliance with the fundamental principles.

120.12 A2 Examples of potential bias to be aware of when exercising professional judgment include:

- Anchoring bias, which is a tendency to use an initial piece of information as an anchor against which subsequent information is inadequately assessed.
- Automation bias, which is a tendency to favor output generated from automated systems, even when human reasoning or contradictory information raises questions as to whether such output is reliable or fit for purpose.
- Availability bias, which is a tendency to place more weight on events or experiences that immediately come to mind or are readily available than on those that are not.
- Confirmation bias, which is a tendency to place more weight on information that corroborates an existing belief than information that contradicts or casts doubt on that belief.
- Groupthink, which is a tendency for a group of individuals to discourage individual creativity and responsibility and as a result reach a decision without critical reasoning or consideration of alternatives.
- Overconfidence bias, which is a tendency to overestimate one's own ability to make accurate assessments of risk or other judgments or decisions.
- Representation bias, which is a tendency to base an understanding on a pattern of experiences, events or beliefs that is assumed to be representative.
- Selective perception, which is a tendency for a person's expectations to influence how the person views a particular matter or person.

120.12 A3 Actions that might mitigate the effect of bias include:

- Seeking advice from experts to obtain additional input.
- Consulting with others to ensure appropriate challenge as part of the evaluation process.

- Receiving training related to the identification of bias as part of professional development.

#### Organizational Culture

120.13 A1 The effective application of the conceptual framework by a professional accountant is enhanced when the importance of ethical values that align with the fundamental principles and other provisions set out in the Code is promoted through the internal culture of the accountant's organization.

120.13 A2 The promotion of an ethical culture within an organization is most effective when:

- (a) Leaders and those in managerial roles promote the importance of, and hold themselves and others accountable for demonstrating, the ethical values of the organization;
- (b) Appropriate education and training programs, management processes, and performance evaluation and reward criteria that promote an ethical culture are in place;
- (c) Effective policies and procedures are in place to encourage and protect those who report actual or suspected illegal or unethical behavior, including whistle-blowers; and
- (d) The organization adheres to ethical values in its dealings with third parties.

120.13 A3 Professional accountants are expected to encourage and promote an ethics-based culture in their organization, taking into account their position and seniority.

#### **Considerations for Audits, Reviews and Other Assurance and Related Services Engagements**

##### Firm Culture

120.14 A1 HKSQM\* 1 sets out requirements and application material relating to firm culture in the context of a firm's responsibilities to design, implement and operate a system of quality management for audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements.

##### Independence

120.15~~2~~ A1 Professional accountants in public practice are required by *Independence Standards* to be independent when performing audits, reviews, or other assurance engagements. Independence is linked to the fundamental principles of objectivity and integrity. It comprises:

- (a) Independence of mind – the state of mind that permits the expression of a conclusion without being affected by influences that compromise professional judgment, thereby allowing an individual to act with integrity, and exercise objectivity and professional skepticism.
- (b) Independence in appearance – the avoidance of facts and circumstances that are so significant that a reasonable and informed third party would be likely to conclude that a firm's or an audit or assurance team member's integrity, objectivity or professional skepticism has been compromised.

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\* To be issued

120.152 A2 *Independence Standards* set out requirements and application material on how to apply the conceptual framework to maintain independence when performing audits, reviews or other assurance engagements. Professional accountants and firms are required to comply with these standards in order to be independent when conducting such engagements. The conceptual framework to identify, evaluate and address threats to compliance with the fundamental principles applies in the same way to compliance with independence requirements. The categories of threats to compliance with the fundamental principles described in paragraph 120.6 A3 are also the categories of threats to compliance with independence requirements.

#### *Professional Skepticism*

120.163 A1 Under auditing, review and other assurance standards, including those issued by the Institute, professional accountants in public practice are required to exercise professional skepticism when planning and performing audits, reviews and other assurance engagements. Professional skepticism and the fundamental principles that are described in Section 110 are inter-related concepts.

120.163 A2 In an audit of financial statements, compliance with the fundamental principles, individually and collectively, supports the exercise of professional skepticism, as shown in the following examples:

- *Integrity* requires the professional accountant to be straightforward and honest. For example, the accountant complies with the principle of integrity by:

- ~~(a)~~ — Being straightforward and honest when raising concerns about a position taken by a client; ~~and~~

- ~~(b)~~ — Pursuing inquiries about inconsistent information and seeking further audit evidence to address concerns about statements that might be materially false or misleading in order to make informed decisions about the appropriate course of action in the circumstances.

- Having the strength of character to act appropriately, even when facing pressure to do otherwise or when doing so might create potential adverse personal or organizational consequences. Acting appropriately involves:

- (a) Standing one's ground when confronted by dilemmas and difficult situations; or

- (b) Challenging others as and when circumstances warrant,

- in a manner appropriate to the circumstances.

In doing so, the accountant demonstrates the critical assessment of audit evidence that contributes to the exercise of professional skepticism.

- *Objectivity* requires the professional accountant ~~not to compromise~~ exercise professional or business judgment without being compromised by ~~because of~~

- ~~(a)~~ Bias;

- ~~(b)~~ Conflict of interest; or

- (c) ~~the u~~Undue influence of others, or undue reliance on, individuals, organizations, technology or other factors.

For example, the accountant complies with the principle of objectivity by:

- (a) Recognizing circumstances or relationships such as familiarity with the client, that might compromise the accountant's professional or business judgment; and
- (b) Considering the impact of such circumstances and relationships on the accountant's judgment when evaluating the sufficiency and appropriateness of audit evidence related to a matter material to the client's financial statements.

In doing so, the accountant behaves in a manner that contributes to the exercise of professional skepticism.

- Professional competence and due care requires the professional accountant to have professional knowledge and skill at the level required to ensure the provision of competent professional service, and to act diligently in accordance with applicable standards, laws and regulations. For example, the accountant complies with the principle of professional competence and due care by:
  - (a) Applying knowledge that is relevant to a particular client's industry and business activities in order to properly identify risks of material misstatement;
  - (b) Designing and performing appropriate audit procedures; and
  - (c) Applying relevant knowledge when critically assessing whether audit evidence is sufficient and appropriate in the circumstances.

In doing so, the accountant behaves in a manner that contributes to the exercise of professional skepticism.

***Additional requirements are set out in Section 600 "Ethics in Tax Practice", Section 700 "Corporate Finance Advice" under Chapter C of the Code.***

## PART 2 – PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS IN BUSINESS

### SECTION 200

#### APPLYING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS IN BUSINESS

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#### Requirements and Application Material

##### General

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200.5 A2 Professional accountants may promote the position of the employing organization when furthering the legitimate goals and objectives of their employing organization, provided that any statements made are neither false nor misleading. Such actions usually would not create an advocacy threat.

200.5 A3 The more senior the position of a professional accountant, the greater will be the ability and opportunity to access information, and to influence policies, decisions made and actions taken by others involved with the employing organization. To the extent that they are able to do so, taking into account their position and seniority in the organization, accountants are expected to encourage and promote an ethics-based culture in the organization in accordance with paragraph 120.13 A3. Examples of actions that might be taken include the introduction, implementation and oversight of:

- Ethics education and training programs.
- Management processes and performance evaluation and reward criteria that promote an ethical culture.
- Ethics and whistle-blowing policies.
- Policies and procedures designed to prevent non-compliance with laws and regulations.

#### Identifying Threats

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## SECTION 220

### PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

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#### Requirements and Application Material

##### General

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220.3 A3 For the purposes of this section, preparing or presenting information includes recording, maintaining and approving information.

**R220.4** When preparing or presenting information, a professional accountant shall:

- (a) Prepare or present the information in accordance with a relevant reporting framework, where applicable;
- (b) Prepare or present the information in a manner that is intended neither to mislead nor to influence contractual or regulatory outcomes inappropriately;
- (c) Exercise professional judgment to to:
  - (i) Represent the facts accurately and completely in all material respects;
  - (ii) Describe clearly the true nature of business transactions or activities; and
  - (iii) Classify and record information in a timely and proper manner; ~~and~~
- (d) Not omit anything with the intention of rendering the information misleading or of influencing contractual or regulatory outcomes inappropriately;
- (e) Avoid undue influence of, or undue reliance on, individuals, organizations or technology; and
- (f) Be aware of the risk of bias.

220.4 A1 An example of influencing a contractual or regulatory outcome inappropriately is using an unrealistic estimate with the intention of avoiding violation of a contractual requirement such as a debt covenant or of a regulatory requirement such as a capital requirement for a financial institution.

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#### Relying on the Work of Others

**R220.7** A professional accountant who intends to rely on the work of others ~~individuals~~, either internal or external to the employing organization, ~~or other organizations~~ shall exercise professional judgment to determine what steps to take, if any, in order to fulfill the responsibilities set out in paragraph R220.4.

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220.7 A1 Factors to consider in determining whether reliance on others is reasonable include:

- The reputation and expertise of, and resources available to, the other individual or organization.
- Whether the other individual is subject to applicable professional and ethics standards.

Such information might be gained from prior association with, or from consulting others about, the other individual or organization.

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THE ROLE AND MINDSET EXPECTED OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

Reasonable and  
informed third party

Reasonable and  
informed third party  
test

*The reasonable and informed third party test is a consideration by the professional accountant about whether the same conclusions would likely be reached by another party. Such consideration is made from the perspective of a reasonable and informed third party, who weighs all the relevant facts and circumstances that the accountant knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, at the time that the conclusions are made. The reasonable and informed third party does not need to be an accountant, but would possess the relevant knowledge and experience to understand and evaluate the appropriateness of the accountant's conclusions in an impartial manner.*

*These terms are described in paragraph 120.5 A64.*

Related entity

An entity that has any of the following relationships with the client:

- (a) An entity that has direct or indirect control over the client if the client is material to such entity;
- (b) An entity with a direct financial interest in the client if that entity has significant influence over the client and the interest in the client is material to such entity;
- (c) An entity over which the client has direct or indirect control;
- (d) An entity in which the client, or an entity related to the client under (c) above, has a direct financial interest that gives it significant influence over such entity and the interest is material to the client and its related entity in (c); and
- (e) An entity which is under common control with the client (a "sister entity") if the sister entity and the client are both material to the entity that controls both the client and sister entity.

## **EFFECTIVE DATE**

This pronouncement will be effective as of 31 December 2021. Early adoption will be permitted.