



Ethical drift refers to the gradual, often unconscious, shift away from professional or ethical standards over time. It usually happens in small steps rather than big leaps, so practitioners don't always notice it until they are pretty far from their intended values.

How it happens

- **Normalisation of minor deviations:** "Just this once" choices become routine.
- **Pressure of context:** Workload, organisational culture, or resource shortages make cutting corners feel necessary.
- **Group influence:** If "everyone does it," behaviours start to feel acceptable.
- **Stress or fatigue:** Under pressure, ethical vigilance drops.

Example

A leader might begin to skip proper reflective practice or avoid consultation on difficult decisions because "there isn't time." At first, it seems like a practical shortcut. Over time, this can erode ethical accountability and establish a risky norm.

Why it matters in supervision

External supervision is powerful here because it:

- Provides **perspective**: someone outside can spot small drifts before they grow.
- Encourages **reflection**: “Why are we doing it this way now?”
- Restores **values alignment**: bringing actions back to professional codes and personal integrity.

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