



ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND GROUP PROCESS CONSULTANTS

A Foundation for Professional Values

Organization development and group process consultation emerged over the course of the 20th century under the leadership of many innovators, including Kurt Lewin in the field of social psychology, Norbert Elias as theorist of the social network, and Ludwig von Bertalanffy as general systems theorist, among others. Its present iteration in the 21st century owes much to the ideas of systems theory, group dynamics, organization dynamics, communication theory, and the behavioral sciences. The field attempts to study and understand how people in organizations and small groups work together to achieve specific ends, and furthermore, to assist people in attaining these ends. It is dedicated to the proposition that we can effectively influence human behavior in organizational settings. These Guidelines are intended to guide organization and process consultants in a high level of ethical practice and support professional conduct. They are meant as an aspirational guide, a statement of ideals toward which organization consultant professionals throughout the world can strive. Our goals are fourfold:

- 1) to increase our ethical consciousness and our sense of professional responsibility
- 2) to make informed ethical choices of how to proceed
- 3) to help the profession function more effectively
- 4) to raise the essential issues which emerge from the practice of consultation and their ethical implications.

These Guidelines represent the work of the Committee for Ethics and Professional Standards, International Association for Group Psychotherapy and Group Processes, B. Roller, Chair, 2010.

The Guidelines owe much of their content to the work of William Gellermann, Mark Frankel, and Robert Ladenson and their text, *Values and Ethics in Organization and Human Systems Development*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

The Work of Organization Development and Group Process Consultants

These professionals recognize the importance of both the process and the content in the completion of the task or work goal. This means recognizing that the process by which systems and organizations function and make decisions is as important as the content of discussion in producing results. Another way of saying this is: a group applies process to content in order to make decisions that lead to actions which result in the completion of a task. When a group works on decision making, *process* includes the following behavior: how people listen, argue, fight, withdraw, and generally support, confront, or undercut one another. Process refers to the emotional ambiance, what is implied, and the organizational culture. Whereas, *content* refers to the communication content specific to the problem-solving or planning behavior. In this field, both process and content are valued, rather than either process or content. Our contribution is primarily in the direction of improving process, whereas our clients tend to primarily value content and tend to focus on the task, and consequently, ignore process. Our challenge is to help clients awaken to the value of process and the way it can help us successfully complete a task.

We see ourselves as part of a global community and recognize that our accomplishments as individuals and colleagues in the field are interdependent; that our responsibilities to each other are mutual; and that the fullest use of our potential shall be realized when we coordinate our efforts in the service of a common vision for humanity.

To that end, we understand that our values and ethics are both personal and professional. We are in a service profession in which we make ourselves and our expertise available. With clarity we are willing and able to discuss with colleagues and clients the way we practice our profession.

The specific fundamental rights we value include:

- 1) life, liberty, and security of person
- 2) freedom of thought, conscience, and religion
- 3) freedom of opinion and expression
- 4) freedom of choice. We accept the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a guide.

Ethical Principles

1. Serve the Good of the Whole and the Good of Individuals

This encompasses the affirmative dimension of our ethics. Note the relationship among moral rules (variations of “do no harm”), the moral ideals (variations of “prevent or lessen harm”), and this central principle (“serve the good of the whole”). The moral rules require us to cause no harm, and that applies to everyone. The moral ideals encourage us to prevent or lessen harm regardless of who causes it, but in contrast to the moral rules, we realistically cannot be expected to do that with regard to everyone. However, to serve the good of the whole encourages us to act in ways that manifest our values. Because of our systems perspective, we see the whole as being more than the sum of its parts and thus we look to a composite value that is more inclusive than the greatest good for the greatest number.

1.1 Always Treat People as Ends, Never only as Means

This principle requires that we respect people for who they are and not merely for what they do. Never treat people as means to organizational ends. Rather, acknowledge and celebrate the importance of their personal life.

Do not focus on people’s positions, such as “CEO”, “manager”, “engineer”, “accountant”, “clerk”, or “employee”. Rather remain sensitive to the individuals who occupy these positions.

1.2 Act in Ways to Increase the Empowerment of the Least Powerful

Although generally the best way to proceed, there are certain conditions which allow ethical justification for challenging this principle. Sometimes in the short term, it may be more effective to facilitate the power of the most powerful stakeholders in an organization in order to achieve greater equality in power distribution among stakeholders in the long term. However, when asked by managers to do things that will increase their power over subordinates, customarily we must encourage them to *support* the empowerment of their subordinates. We do this to increase the power available to both managers and

subordinates to actualize their potential --- not to dominate from a one-up position or sabotage from a one-down position.

1.3 To be a competent professional *always* implies ethical practice because to be competent, one must be continually reflecting on one's own behavior and reflecting on the consequences of one's actions.

1.4 The sense of ethics depends to a large degree on the ability of people to imagine the lives of others and empathize with their circumstances.

Responsibility for Professional Development and Competence

2 Accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions. Make every effort to ensure that our services are properly used and for the good of the people who are the target of our organizational intervention. Be ready to terminate our services if they are not properly used or used to the detriment of those we are supposed to help. Make all efforts to see that abuses of power or abuses of persons are named and corrected.

This raises the issue of who we serve as consultant. Do we serve the executives and CEO only or do our responsibilities lie with their employees? This is never a simple question. Often, following the wishes of a CEO is not in the interest of the organization, especially if the CEO has mistakenly defined the problem as the need to eliminate an employee or several employees. In these cases, an employee may be perceived as controlling because he or she may be taking on responsibilities that are beyond the scope of his or her job description-- and yet, need to be done. In some cases, employees may be scapegoated for doing so, since other employees may resent their working beyond their job descriptions. Looking deeper, it is possible that the problem lies not in the employees, but in how their jobs have been defined and the need for new job positions to meet the needs of the organization.

Consultants must be willing to help the CEO pause and reflect and assess the genuine needs of the organization. This will require the accurate definition of the

problem. If this means the elimination of employees, there must be a reasonable justification in doing so.

2.1 Develop and maintain our individual competence and establish cooperative relations with other professionals in the field and outside the field. Our profession includes all practitioners who conceive of their work as Human Systems Development---which can range from the development of individuals to the development of international relations and transnational systems, including organizations and all manner of subsystems between. We must be devoted to expanding our competence within our particular areas of concentration as well as sufficient competence in other areas so that we can cooperate with our colleagues. Our accomplishments, individually and collectively, are interdependent.

2.2 The range of competencies for an organization development and group process consultant ought to include knowledge of theory and practice in: applied behavioral sciences, leadership, management, administration, and organizational behavior, labor union issues, collective bargaining, contracting, and quality of work life; multicultural issues, including color and gender; cross-cultural issues, including our own ethnocentric tendencies and the differences within and between various countries and cultures; values and ethics as they apply to our specific client systems; fields of knowledge and practice relevant to our area of specialty. This range of competencies is by no means exhaustive of the possible skills that ought to be mastered as a consultant seeks to specialize his or her practice. For example, philosophy, physics, economics, and linguistics are among the fields the consultant may wish to study, given his or her penchant or life interest.

2.3 Further competencies are required in our ability to act effectively with groups, individuals, large and complex systems; the ability to provide consultation using methods of applied behavioral science; the ability to cope with the apparent contradiction in applying behavioral science that arises when our real approach is intuitive and not clearly grounded in science; the ability to

articulate theory and direct its application, including the creation of learning experiences for individuals, small and large groups, and complex systems.

2.4 Establish collegial and cooperative relations with other professionals in the field. These include but are not limited to: asking colleagues to be consultants to give us feedback and suggestions about our own development, and help us locate our blind spots.

2.5 Create partnerships with colleagues to enhance our effectiveness in serving clients whose needs are greater than we can serve alone.

2.6 Recognize our personal needs and desires and manage them responsibly in the performance of our professional roles and duties. This includes avoiding actions or statements that might foster perceptions that our self interest conflicts with our client's interest, as when strong emotional or romantic attachments might be perceived as affecting our professional judgment.

2.7 See that the boundaries between consultant and client are maintained so that the purpose of the consultation is not compromised.

2.8 Practice within the limits of our culture and experience in providing services and techniques. Do not seek nor accept assignments outside the limits of your competence. Or if you do so, make it clear to the client that you are exploring the outer edge of your knowledge and experience.

2.9 Refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.

2.10 Consult with colleagues who are more knowledgeable about the unique conditions of clients whose problems involve areas in which you are inexperienced.

2.11 Practice in cultures different from your own only with consultation from people native to or knowledgeable about those specific cultures.

Responsibility to Clients and Significant Others

3 Serve the long-term well-being and interests of our client systems.

This means we resist the request to assist the short term interests of our client at the expense of the clients' long term interests. We will remain alert to long term considerations and seek to serve them as much as possible within the confines of our contract. If we cannot do so with integrity, we shall either renegotiate the contract or withdraw from the intervention.

3.1 We ought to be aware of the beliefs and values relevant to serving our clients, including the values which inform ourselves and our culture. In this manner, we ought to make explicit our beliefs, values, and ethics as professionals.

3.2 Avoid automatic confirmation of predetermined conclusions about the client's situation. We must be thoughtful of all options for our client and not just those the client thinks must be done.

3.3 Be clear that the system is the client, not just the CEO paying the bill. You have been hired to fairly assess the options for an entire system, not just to affirm the prejudices of a particular leader.

3.4 Assess the need to balance the timing, pace, and degree of change so that the system remains in concert with its particular environment. Conduct your intervention in a way that makes transparency and openness a hallmark of your activity. However, the frank exposure of something the system *cannot* change may be unnecessarily destructive. Therefore, assess the ability of the system to cope with the information you are prepared to give.

3.5 Inform the people we work with about the nature of the project we are asking them to participate in. Tell them about our role, strategy, our expected outcomes, and possible limitations and risks. Support their freedom of choice to participate or not---or, when the intervention is initiated and mandated by upper echelons of a management hierarchy, acknowledge the limited choice of workers who must participate as a part of their job performance or skill set acquisition.

3.6 When working with people from another culture than your own, be careful that they do not attribute to you an expertise that does not fit their cultural conditions. Make relevant cultural differences clear so that participants will be alert to the difficulties in applying your recommendations to their cultural milieu.

3.7 Enable the people you consult to learn the skills you teach and not be continually relying on you for consultation.

3.8 Monitor and evaluate the effects of your work. Determine if your activities have accomplished the agreed upon goals. Seek to identify and undo any unexpected negative consequences, rather than cover them up.

3.9 Actively solicit and respond with an open mind to feedback regarding your work.

3.10 Terminate work with a client when it becomes clear the client is not benefiting from your intervention---or when the terms of the contract have been completed. Do not continue to work with a client if the work is not consistent with the ethical guidelines outlined in this statement.

Ensure mutual agreement on a fair contract covering services and remuneration

4 Clarify the agreement about services to be performed. Do not change the agreement without a clearly defined rationale for the shift and the informed consent of clients. Ensure mutual understanding by putting the terms of the contract in writing when possible. However, some professionals prefer a verbal agreement over a written one, because the contract may be changed as the work progresses and, in such cases, the written contract unnecessarily formalizes and rigidifies the working relationship.

4.1 Safeguard the best interests of your client by making sure the financial arrangements are fair and in keeping with professional standards.

4.2 Fully inform your client of your opinions about serving competing organizations: What are your loyalties and responsibilities when conflicts of interest arise? Be transparent with your client about these conflicts. Stop work with a client if these conflicts of interest cannot be resolved.

4.3 Act impartially when involved in conflicts among parties in a client system. Help them resolve their conflicts themselves without taking sides. If you must change your role as impartial consultant, do so explicitly and give reasons for doing so.

4.4 Respond to any major differences in professionally relevant ethics between yourself and your clients. If necessary, be prepared to terminate work, explaining your reasons.

4.5 Accept differences in the expectations and interests of different stakeholders in a client system and realize that differences cannot always be reconciled.

4.6 Work cooperatively with other internal and external consultants serving the same client system. Make appropriate arrangements with these consultants about how you will define roles as consultants and share responsibilities.

4.7 Seek consultation from neutral third parties in cases of conflict involving yourself and the clients or other consultants.

Define and protect confidentiality in client relationships

5 Make the limits of confidentiality clear to clients. Unless we make these limits explicit, we can find ourselves being told things that put us in conflict between protecting our clients' interest and respecting our commitment to confidentiality. Unlike therapists, we seldom, if ever, can appropriately commit to unlimited confidentiality.

5.1 Reveal information accepted in confidence only to agreed upon persons or professional colleagues when discussion with them is a shared confidence and compatible with the interests of our clients.

5.2 Obtain prior consent from clients before you present your work with them in papers or lectures. Make every attempt to disguise the individuals and corporate systems.

5.3 Maintain confidentiality in the storage and disposal of records.

5.4 Help clients make informed choices by being clear about the services you provide, neither exaggerating possible outcomes nor minimizing the possible risks. Deliver the services you advertise and obtain informed consent when you initiate a new strategy or approach.

Responsibility to the profession

6 Contribute to the professional development of other practitioners by mentoring less experienced consultants, consulting with colleagues when appropriate, and sharing ideas, methods and findings pertinent to the work at conferences and other learning opportunities.

6.1 Grant the use of our copyrighted materials as freely as possible, subject to minimum conditions, including a reasonable price based on commercial value.

6.2 Collaborate with other professionals in an effort to exemplify what organization development and process consultants stand for. Strive to establish mutual understanding about the purposes, goals, and responsibilities of the profession.

6.3 Work actively for ethical practice by individuals and organizations who engage in this work. In cases of questionable practice, join other professionals in using appropriate channels to confront the offending practice.

6.4 Act in ways that bring credit to the profession and with due regard for colleagues in other professions, not directly involved in the practice of consultation.

Social Responsibility

7 Accept responsibility for and act with sensitivity to the fact that our recommendations may alter the lives and well-being of our clients and the larger world of which they are a part.

7.1 Act with awareness of our own cultural filters and with sensitivity to international and multicultural differences and their implications.

7.2 Respect the customs, beliefs, morals, and values of the various communities and countries in which we consult. Constructively confront the counterproductive aspects of those cultures whenever feasible, being alert to the effects our own cultural orientation may have on our judgments.

7.3 Promote justice and serve the well-being of all life on earth. Help our clients determine what fairness and justice mean for them and promote that vision whenever and wherever we can. If, in consulting with a client, our ethical standards are violated, then we are obliged to withdraw our assistance.

7.4 Accept some clients *pro bono* allowing them to pay minimal or no fees.

7.5 Engage in cooperative efforts to help people across cultures and nationalities. Act consistently with the ethics of the global scientific community in supporting the more equal distribution of wealth among societies and the protection of the global environment.

7.6 In embracing these guidelines, we recognize that we are holding ourselves to standards that may be more exacting than the laws of many countries in which we practice, or more than the expectations of our clients.

These Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards for Organization Development and Group Process Consultants are a living document responding to the challenges of the times and the contexts in which they are most needed. As such, they will require regular review. As an integral part of the IAGP, they will evolve in order to stay in tune with the experiences of member organizations and developments within the field of organization development, as well as changes in cultures and societies.