

EPAC - APEC

*Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada
Association des praticiens en éthique du Canada*

Competency Profile of Ethics Practitioners

June 5, 2001

Available in English and French at www.epac-apec.ca

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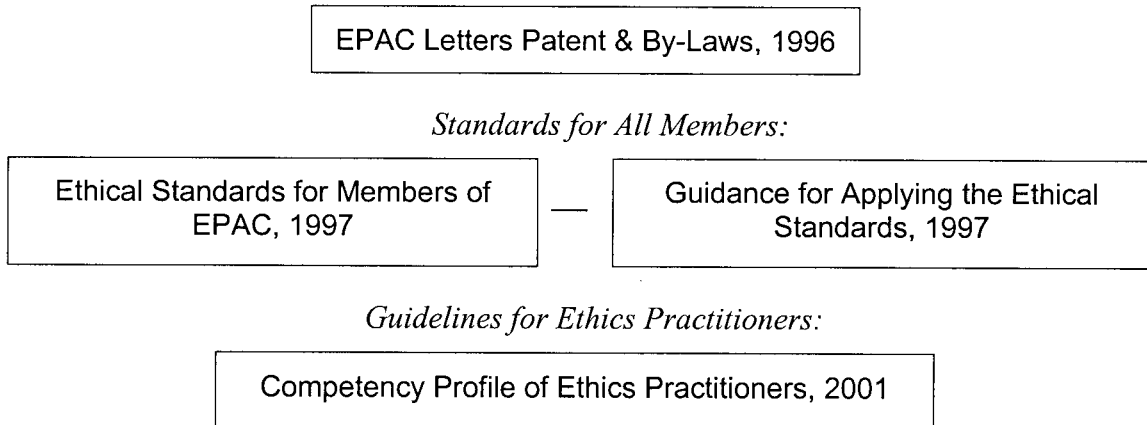
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Introduction

Interest in ethics as it applies to organizations in the public, private and voluntary sectors is growing rapidly. Professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience are providing advice, teaching, and consulting on ethics in organizations. The rapid growth of this professional activity has led the Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada (EPAC) to develop a voluntary self-governing framework for ethical conduct in the field.

Self-Governing Framework



It is important to note that knowledge of and adherence to the *Ethical Standards for Members* is a condition of membership in EPAC. The Standards must also be taken into account in the various uses of the *Competency Profile of Ethics Practitioners* set out below. English and French versions of these documents are available on the EPAC Web site (www.epac-apec.ca).

Uses of the Competency Profile

The Competency Profile forms the basis of a **self-assessment guide**, currently under development, that will assist ethics practitioners to determine their competencies in organizational ethics as well as any gaps that need attention.

The Competency Profile is also designed:

- to assist **practitioners** to present themselves to clients, design their marketing literature and résumés, and prepare themselves for job interviews;
- to guide **potential employers and clients** when they are engaging professionally competent practitioners by helping them to develop detailed job specifications, employment advertising, résumé screening tools, and interview questions; and
- to enable **educators** to design programs and develop detailed learning objectives for courses, workshops, mentoring programs, and materials for ethics practitioners.

Structure of the Competency Profile

The threshold standard for a competent ethics practitioner to be active in the field of organizational ethics may be described in two different but complementary ways. The first sets out the essential **functions** that an ethics practitioner carries out (see Part I below). The second sets out the **knowledge and skills** that an ethics practitioner should possess (see Part II below).

Users of the Competency Profile may choose the descriptions in Part I or Part II or both to meet their particular needs (some cross-referencing has been provided). Those requiring a succinct statement of what ethics practitioners **do**, for purposes of establishing an ethics officer position for example, may find Part I most helpful. Those requiring a listing of what ethics practitioners should **know** or **be skilled at**, for purposes of conceptualizing learning activities for practitioners for example, may find Part II most helpful. For some purposes, such as self-assessment of practitioners, both Parts I and II will be required.

Definitions

Ethics Practitioners Includes ethics consultants and principal ethics officers of organizations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Ethical Standards A statement of the values and principles relating to how ethics practitioners should conduct themselves in carrying out their work.

Competency Profile A statement of the key functions carried out by a professional group, as well the essential knowledge and skills required to carry out the work.

Functions The specialized activities undertaken by a professional group to support their overall goal (activities such as developing ethics programs).

Knowledge The subject-matter information needed to carry out the work (information such as understanding of major theories of ethics).

Skills The practised ability or facility to carry out the work, including aptitudes and talents (abilities such as using constructive dialogue on ethical issues).

Approach

The approach to competency in this document recognizes that there is no single accepted standard for values and ethics programs in organizations. The approach also acknowledges that diversity and creativity are essential to the development of the field. There is, however, an extensive literature on ethics applied to organizations, with a core set of concepts and a recognized use of language.

The approach allows for some competencies to be deemed more important than others in certain regions and sectors of activity. For example, ethics practitioners in Quebec and in the federal public sector have tended to place particular emphasis on dialogue among employees as a means of fostering an ethical workplace.

The approach is based on the view that a successful ethics program incorporates and balances an emphasis on values and integrity with the necessary compliance procedures. In Canada, compliance-based approaches tend to emphasize prevention and cost-effective managerial and financial controls, while values- and integrity-based approaches tend to emphasize positive standards that set out ethical goals. A well-balanced ethics program fosters the development of highly committed employees who accept a personal stewardship for the ethics of their organization.

The approach recognizes that everyone in an organization is responsible for his or her own ethical behaviour. Ethics practitioners support and empower others in their ethical decision-making. As well, practitioners in many other fields may provide advice and analysis supporting an ethical organizational culture. Ethics practitioners are those who spend a substantial part of their time providing ethics-related services. The role of the ethics practitioner can vary from facilitating initiatives to actually carrying them out with the organization involved.

Part I: Functions of Ethics Practitioners

Outline

The overall goal of ethics practitioners is to support and promote ethical behaviour and standards for individuals in organizations. To this end, ethics practitioners:

- work together with the organizations concerned to identify, analyze and develop ethical culture, standards and acceptable behaviour;
- provide reliable, objective, and comprehensive expertise to promote and reinforce ethical behaviour of executives, managers and staff, as well as ethical relations with other stakeholders;
- support balanced values and compliance frameworks for ethics;
- help assess the ethical cultures of organizations; and
- ensure the integrity and credibility of this professional activity.

To carry out their work, ethics practitioners carry out the following functions. The first four relate to standard parts of an organizational ethics program:

1. organizational needs and ethics programs
2. standards
3. leadership and decision-making
4. ethics advice

The fifth function relates to wider circumstances of organizational life:

5. social responsibility of organizations

The next function relates to a critical value in all ethics practice:

6. trust

The two final functions relate to the professional attributes of individual practitioners:

7. knowledge and expertise
8. high professional standards

Functions

Ethics practitioners carry out the following functions **together with the organizations concerned** in order to empower individuals in the organizations to promote and sustain an ethical culture.

1. Develop ethics programs and initiatives that respond to organizational needs.

- a) Identify the values, mission and goals of organizations and their stakeholders, as well as their management and accountability structures.
- b) Identify strengths, weaknesses, and threats to ethical conduct in the organization.
- c) Determine and design an effective approach, as well as the objectives of an ethics program or project based on a comprehensive needs analysis.
- d) Identify and communicate differences between ideal ethical standards and existing organizational practices.
- e) Develop an organizational infrastructure to support ethics training, guidance, reinforcement and communications.
- f) Foster the use of dialogue between members of the organization for the purpose of determining the organizational values, designing the code of ethics or conduct, and resolving ethical issues.

2. Develop and implement appropriate ethical standards and processes.

- a) Identify best practices for developing ethical standards appropriate to different organizations.
- b) Develop mission and values statements, codes of ethics and conduct, standards of practice, or other standards-setting techniques, as appropriate.
- c) Identify processes to ensure that all relevant policies, procedures and practices are consistent with an organization's ethical standards.

3. Promote ethical leadership and decision-making at all levels of the organization.

- a) Identify strategies to enable individuals to demonstrate ethical leadership.
- b) Identify patterns, trends and issues that require ethical consideration by managers and by employees.
- c) Design leadership programs to promote ethical and values-based behaviour.

d) Identify appropriate ethical decision-making techniques to recognize and deal with ethical issues faced by staff and managers.

e) Identify and design effective means of communicating and reinforcing ethical decisions.

4. Provide guidance to empower individuals and organizations to address specific ethical issues and dilemmas.

a) Identify and analyze ethical issues and dilemmas facing individuals and organizations.

b) Reconcile differences between ethics and personal, professional, corporate and societal values and goals.

c) Collect and assess information on the organizational and environmental contexts of the issues and dilemmas.

d) Identify the appropriate application of ethics, values, morality and the law to the issues and dilemmas.

e) Select and apply strategies for resolving ethical issues and dilemmas.

f) Counsel individuals on ethical matters.

g) Identify and design policies and procedures to allow individuals to safely report breaches of ethical conduct and for remedying breaches of ethical conduct.

5. Design and provide advice on social responsibility frameworks.

a) Identify relevant national and international standards on such matters as human rights, labour, and environment.

b) Identify and develop strategies to meet organizational social responsibilities to stakeholders and the wider society.

c) Identify relevant governance issues, including transparency and accountability.

d) Identify acceptable organizational practices and standards in relation to social responsibilities (including social audits).

e) Develop policies and procedures for assessing and reporting on organizational performance in the social responsibility area, including progress towards such goals as sustainability.

(For more information on the knowledge and skills associated with the above five functions related to engaging in ethics projects, see Part II, sections A and B.)

6. Gain and maintain the respect and trust of clients.

- a) Explain clearly the nature of the work to be done, the results to be achieved and any costs that may be incurred.
- b) Assess complex issues in varied situations objectively and impartially.
- c) Nurture acceptance and commitment to action.
- d) Demonstrate effective methods for dealing with ambiguity and change.
- e) Explain clearly any limitations of expertise as an ethics practitioner.
- f) Facilitate constructive dialogue on values and ethics in working together with clients.
- g) Promote and use teamwork as an approach to the application of ethics in organizations.
- h) Ensure expectations are met in a timely fashion.
- i) Recognize the impact of own behaviour on others.
- j) Seek performance feedback and act on it.

(See also Part II, section B1.)

7. As an ethics practitioner, maintain a high level of professional knowledge and expertise for the purpose of applying ethics and values in organizations.

- a) Acquire and maintain the general and required specialized knowledge of theories and concepts of high ethical standards, applied ethics and best practices.
- b) Acquire and maintain the ability to analyze and question the validity of ethical standards and practices.
- c) Understand generally national and international ethical standards for individual and organizational conduct as well as cultural differences that may exist.
- d) Understand generally the different theories of organizational management as they apply to ethics.
- e) Understand generally the legal context for the application of ethics in organizations.

(See also Part II, section A.)

8. As an ethics practitioner, maintain and promote high professional and ethical standards.

- a) Demonstrate high standard of personal integrity and ethical behaviour.
- b) Maintain awareness and practise the ethical standards for ethics practitioners.
- c) Promote the development of expertise through mentoring, supporting colleagues and sharing information.
- d) Contribute to the development of the field through such activities as research, publication, or teaching.
- e) Participate actively in professional organizations involved in the field of ethics.

(See also the *Ethical Standards for Members of EPAC*.)

Part II: Knowledge and Skills of Ethics Practitioners

This part of the competency profile focusses on the specific knowledge of ethics-related matters that is required by ethics practitioners (section A), and the key skills required in the application and use of this knowledge in ethics work in organizations (section B). A note on desirable personal traits (section C) concludes the document.

While the skills are in themselves not unique to work in the field of ethics, the skills identified below are of particular importance to ethics activities in organizations.

The competency profile does **not** address the knowledge and skills related to the business end of being a consultant in any field of organizational management or development, including marketing, contracting, project management, data-gathering, partnering, and reporting. As well, this document does **not** address the knowledge and skills required by senior officers in any organization, such as human and financial resource management, training and communications, internal compliance systems, and program management.

It is to be noted that no attempt is made in this Profile to set out performance indicators or learning objectives as such. The Profile serves as the first step towards producing such indicators and objectives.

A. Knowledge

1. Ethics theory

- a) Understanding of the language used in discussing ethics and ethical issues, including the use of terms such as ethics, values, social responsibility, morality, religion, and law.
- b) Understanding of major ethical theories and their application in advising organizations (that is, the goals to be attained in the ethics of organizations).
- c) Understanding of ethical decision-making models based on values, principles and moral reasoning.
- d) Understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to ethics, values and morality.

2. Management

- a) Understanding of organizational management (that is, the context of the ethics of organizations).
- b) Understanding of the relationship between organizational values and ethics, and personal beliefs and convictions.

- c) Understanding of organizational behaviour and trends from the point of view of the social, psychological and management sciences.

3. Public expectations

- a) Understanding of society's current expectations on ethical behaviour, and public knowledge of ethics and ethical issues, especially as they apply to organizations (that is, the base-line of the ethics of organizations).
- b) Understanding of major national and international ethics cases and trends related to ethics.
- c) Understanding of trends **not** related to ethics in the sectors in which the practitioner is active, whether public, private or voluntary.
- d) Understanding of cultural differences, especially as they relate to organizations.

4. Programs, stakeholders and networks

- a) Understanding of ethics practices in organizations, including actual and best practices in ethics in public and private sectors.
- b) Understanding of the stakeholders likely to be involved in an ethics issue and their needs.
- c) Understanding of ethics networks, knowledgeable individuals, and other resources, as well as how and when to use them.

5. Law

- a) Understanding of legal standards, especially those related to the ethics of organizations (dealing, for example, with conflict of interest).
- b) Understanding of the law (short of providing legal opinions) as it applies to ethics-related issues of harassment, privacy, environmental issues, health and safety, bribery, etc.
- c) Understanding of the scope of ethical behaviour beyond minimal compliance with the law.

6. Related and specialty fields

- a) General understanding of related fields with possible applications to ethics projects, such as: sampling and polling, auditing and evaluation, governance and accountability, commercial practices, human resources management.

- b) General understanding of specialty fields within ‘organizational ethics’, such as: social accounting and audits, fraud awareness, anti-corruption, conflict of interest, legal compliance, corporate social responsibility, professional standards.
- c) General understanding of other specialties within ‘applied ethics’, such as: bioethics, environmental ethics, legal ethics.

7. Ethics Practitioners’ Association of Canada (EPAC)

- a) Understanding of EPAC ethical standards and guidelines.
- b) Understanding of the position of EPAC standards in relation to other ethical standards and ethics generally.

(See also Part I, Function 7 for more information on knowledge.)

B. Skills

1. Trust

- a) Gaining and building the trust of others, as an essential part of work in ethics. (See Part I, Function 6.)

2. Objectivity and balance

- a) Striving to be increasingly fair, objective and impartial in giving advice and guidance related to ethics issues.
- b) Adjusting the approach employed so as to avoid excesses of both relativism and dogmatism in ethics.

3. Limitations of practitioner and work environment

- a) Recognizing personal limitations in carrying on ethics projects, as well as limits to the role of the ethics practitioner.
- b) Striving for the most desirable ethical solutions while recognizing legitimate limitations within the work environment concerned.

4. Listening

- a) Non-judgmental listening as a primary tool for work on ethics.
- b) Drawing out ‘client-driven’ solutions on a broad spectrum of ethics-related issues.

5. Stakeholder focus

- a) Working together with diverse stakeholders on ethical problems.
- b) Helping members of organizations to improve themselves and their organizations' ethical practices.

6. Dialogue

- a) Facilitating constructive dialogue on ethical issues.
- b) Clarifying unexpressed and partly expressed matters so that they can be integrated into ethics programs.

7. Teamwork and co-operation

- a) Being a team player with clients, other stakeholders, and other specialists during ethics projects.
- b) Bridging organizational divisions where lack of co-operation is causing ethical problems.
- c) Utilizing skills of other specialists and building teams with an effective mix of skills to address specific issues related to ethics.
- d) Promoting broad synergies and being a catalyst for significant improvement in the ethical milieu.

8. Transparency and confidentiality

- a) Promoting and exemplifying transparency as a central ethical requirement, while recognizing the rules of confidentiality.

9. Leadership

- a) Giving due recognition to the importance of leadership in the implementation of ethics-related programming.
- b) Interacting easily with leaders as well as members at all other organizational levels on ethics-related issues.
- c) Leading discussion on ethics in organizations, in the profession and before the general public.

(See Part I, Function 3.)

10. Consulting business, where applicable

- a) Following impeccable business practices in the ethics consulting endeavour and maintaining the exemplary ethical reputation of the consulting practice in all circumstances.

11. Applying ethics

- a) Applying ethical knowledge appropriately and usefully to the organizational environment, including distinguishing values and ethics in different organizational settings (private, public and voluntary sectors).
- b) Integrating what the organization **ought** to be asking for into project design.

12. Analysis

- a) Demonstrating strong ability to examine and describe clearly the component parts and essential features of ethics- and values-related issues and problems.
- b) Identifying logical inconsistencies, even in areas tangential to the project.

13. Risk

- a) Identifying and evaluating ethical risk.
- b) Developing anticipatory risk management strategies.

14. Synthesis

- a) Combining diverse factors, based on sound analysis, into coherent solutions to ethical issues.
- b) Balancing between the demands of ethics and the requirements of on-going organizational processes.

15. Advice

- a) Providing effective advice and guidance, including useful and useable recommendations and interventions, based on a) a clear understanding of various approaches, frameworks and standards in applied ethics, b) the behaviour of organizations, and c) society's expectations and knowledge of ethical issues.
- b) Creating ethics cultures and undertaking integrated program development, implementation and assessment, including ethics training, guidance, and reinforcement.

- c) Being persuasive about enhancing ethics in organizations without either advocating a dogmatic approach, or reducing ethics to a public relations exercise.

16. Formulating

- a) Writing reports on cases, consultations and similar subjects.
- b) Developing ethical codes, guidelines, policies, case studies, audits and such.
- c) Producing specialized and complex texts on ethics.

17. Counselling and training

- a) Counselling, coaching and training members of organizations on ethical issues.
- b) Providing practical training courses for groups on ethical issues, as well as training the trainers.

(See Part I, Functions 1 to 5 for more information on standard parts of organizational ethics programs.)

18. Professional development: continuous learning

- a) Developing continuously in ethics generally and in chosen specialties within ethics.
- b) Acquiring knowledge quickly by exercising curiosity and initiative in finding relevant information and organizing it effectively.
- c) Counselling, coaching and training specialists in other fields, as well as ethics practitioners, on ethical issues.

C. Note on Desirable Personal Traits

The following list of traits, to be read in conjunction with the *Ethical Standards for Members of EPAC*, is included to complete the picture of a competent ethics practitioner. However, it does not form part of the formal requirements set out for ethics practitioners under sections A and B.

- a) Being a person of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness.
- b) Being, and being seen to be, a model of ethical behaviour at work and in private life.
- c) Showing consistency between words and deeds.
- d) Being open-minded and tolerant.
- e) Demonstrating respect for others and sensitivity to diversity.
- f) Caring about what happens to people and human relationships as a result of professional advice.
- g) Caring about ethics in society generally, and the impact of professional advice on organizations.
- h) Showing courage, wisdom and common sense in advancing ethics.

Acknowledgements

Prepared by the EPAC Competencies Task Force under Cornelius von Baeyer, with the assistance of Michael Sutton. Other members of the task force: Jane Garthson, Marc Terreau, Diane Girard, Norm Steinberg, Joan Grass, Pierre Cronier, Marc Saner, and Art Voth. The advisory group included David Nitkin, Peg Tittle, Vincent di Norcia, Susan Quinn, Bill Maxwell and other EPAC board members. Part I is based on a first draft by Alan Gilmore and Diane Charron, as well as comments from the task force and advisory group, and a workshop held at the September 2000 conference of the International Institute for Public Ethics. Part II is based on a task force brainstorming exercise held in Ottawa, August 4, 1999 and comments from the advisory group, a standards consultant of Human Resources Development Canada, and a workshop held in conjunction with the 1999 annual general meeting of EPAC. Public Works and Government Services Canada prepared a French translation, which Diane Girard and Jacques Itié edited.