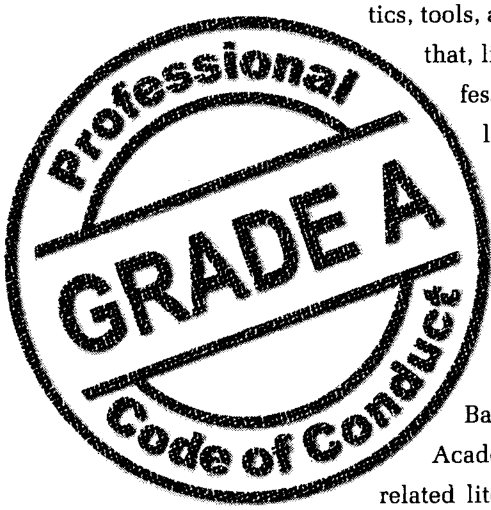
A Scientific Dialogue: A Performance Accomplishment Code of Professional Conduct

by Ryan Watkins, Doug Leigh, and Roger Kaufman

Around us each day the landscape of business and organizational management continues to change. Industries develop—and sometime vaporize—overnight, and with each comes a new set of opportunities and challenges for managers and other professionals focused on the measurable improvement of useful performance. Our bookshelves are filled with the writings of experts on the newest trends and the latest fads of business management. As professionals, we often rely on the professional habits that have lead us to success in the past instead of developing new tactics, tools, and concepts that may lead to success in the future. We suggest that, like many of these business practices, the informal code of professional conduct we now apply in our daily activities will likely lead us to failure in the future. Thus, it is time for those committed to achieving a useful, justifiable, and measurable "better tomorrow" through the improvement of individual and organizational performance to define a holistic and inclusive professional code of conduct that defines our profession and guides our activities.



Based on the Standards on Ethics and Integrity established by the Academy of Human Resources Development (Dean, 1999) and related literature in management ethics and conduct (Westgaard, 1988; Drucker, 1999; Deming, 1972; Dean 1993, 1994; Pava & Krausz, 1995), this article intends to build these general guidelines and common set of values into functional and durable applications for the performance accomplishment/performance technology[1] professional. Through a discussion of the activities and contributions we as professionals make within the field, we hope to explore the changing role of organizations within our society, as well as the responsibilities and ideals of professionals, customers, clients, and society. This code of professional conduct is intended to open a dialogue regarding the scientific-based role we as professionals can and should play within organizations and communities.

Recent articles by Clark and Estes (1999), Kaufman (1987; 1996), Kaufman & Clark (1999), Dean (1993; 1994; 1999), Jennings and Entine (1999), and others have challenged us as professionals and moved us to question many practices common within the professions of organizational development, performance improvement, instructional design, distance education, and organizational management. Common questions now include: How many CD-ROM training packages with questionable relevance can be produced before clients suspect our integrity when spending their money? How many training courses can be released with a polished and "sexy" appearance that don't demonstrate value added to the participants, the organization, or external stakeholders? How many students of distance education programs cannot meet basic industry skill requirements before clients and communities question the empirical evidence for the processes we use for defining what is appropriate for Internet delivery? How many sexual harassment lawsuits have to be settled before the world questions what value our profession is adding to organizations and society? Based on questions like these and the works of other professionals, this article suggests a possible code of professional conduct by which each of us should regulate our activities and apply our profession's standards of ethics and integrity.

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The Changing Focus of Organizations

In today's organizational management environment there is an increasing requirement to deliver measurable value to external clients and society in addition to our direct customers (Popcorn, 1991); Dean, 1999; Drucker, 1993, Kaufman, 1972, 1998, 2000; Kaufman et al., 1998). This increasing requirement for results—the consequences and payoffs of what we use, do, produce, and deliver—represents a new era for business and organizational management. According to Kaufman (accompanying article in this issue), we as professionals no longer have the luxury of leaving the big questions.

The new era of organizational management and, we suggest, performance improvement is one focused on defining, justifying (on the basis of empirical research), and achieving useful results for all stakeholders: both internal and external to the organization. As professionals we are being called on to prove the value we add to the clients, the organization, and the community. And while in years past professionals could assume the value added by their efforts, assumptions are no longer enough. Evidence, in terms of empirical data, must include what was done, delivered, and accomplished and the value it added for all stakeholders. We can no longer get away with merely "feel-good" discussions or advertising slogans of what benefit we assume to have added to clients and our society.

Today we see organizations worldwide increasingly including societal value-added as an integral ingredient of their organizational purpose statement (Kaufman, accompanying article in this issue; Kaufman et al., 1998). Though research is still developing, conclusive evidence is emerging regarding the implementation of socially responsible practices based on such purpose statements. Nevertheless, if fiscal benefits can be realized by acting in the best interest of clients, we are confident that organizational practices will follow the trends toward societal responsibility (after all, dead customers are rarely repeat customers). Furthermore, Pava and Krausz (1995) have provided evidence that "socially responsible" organizations perform at least as well or better financially than those organizations that focus solely on the conventional bottom line.

As professional managers and performance improvement consultants, when working with organizations we too often overlook or assume the value we are adding to internal and external clients as well as society. We find ourselves referring to profits, customer satisfaction, and funding levels as the boundaries of organizational concern and responsibility. In so doing we miss an emerging paradigm that all organizations can benefit from (a paradigm that embraces organizations as means to societal ends...often finding their greatest success in responsibly adding value to lives of their clients). This is a paradigm of socially responsible professional conduct. As Peter Drucker (1999) points out, "The institution, in short, does not simply exist within and react to society. It exists to produce results on and in society."

As we have attempted to move the organizations we work with from the traditional training mindset to one of performance improvement, we have often forgotten that we too must apply the same performance focus to our work that we ask others to apply to theirs. We must define, justify, obtain, and provide evidence of the value we have added to our clients, their clients, their clients' clients, and society overall. We suggest that this new era of responsibility requires of us a new code of professional conduct for professional managers as well as performance improvement consultants—a code of professional conduct that reflects our profession's ethics and integrity (Dean, 1999) as well as the application of what we have shown to be successful (through empirical research related to management by objectives, quality management, and performance improvement) within our own practices. This practice will help us to measure our success on the basis of the successful results that our clients achieve.

In presenting a code of professional conduct for our field, we urge a different label than "human performance technology." It focuses on too narrow a scope (only human) and uses "technology" to describe the tools we apply—without referencing the results we work to achieve.

Preliminary Code of Professional Conduct[2]

Introduction

1. The objective of my work as a professional is (a) to provide organizations and individuals with the skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitude necessary to create opportunities for achieving desired and required individual, organizational, and societal results; (b) to assist in the generation of new and valid knowledge that will lead to the attainment of results that meet the performance criteria demanded by individuals, organizations, and society; (c) to acquire the knowledge through systematic and valid research methods without jeopardizing the success of my client, my client's clients, or society; and (d) to produce the results required by my client.
2. I will not enter into any engagement (a) that violates one or more of the codes of conduct stated here or the profession's standards on ethics and integrity; (b) in which the pending results cannot be linked to or are not aligned with the organizational mission and positive contributions to society; (c) that will not lead to the achievement of measurable contributions to the attainment of the ideal vision (creating a measurably better world for future generations).
3. An engagement with a client requires certain responsibilities for the consultant or employee, as well as for the client organization. I will state these responsibilities as well as my biases explicitly to provide all stakeholders with the necessary information and expectations prior to making a decision regarding the acceptance of position or engagement.
4. Missing data *are* data. Thus, when my efforts uncover performance issues for which the client currently has no measures, I will include these "missing cells" in my report and suggest means by which the client can develop measures of successful accomplishment of required performance.

The Obligations of the Professional

As a professional, I will—

5. Never knowingly mislead or lie to my client. I will be truthful and inform the client of all procedures, costs, and anticipated results prior to conducting activities for which they are paying me (this may include providing information that is not aligned with what the client currently states as their desire).
6. Not conduct activities outside the boundaries of my professional competence based on my professional experiences, training, and education. In those rare instances when achieving results requires work in emerging areas where experiences, training, and education are not available yet, I will inform the client of the appropriate measures that should be taken to ensure the competence of my work.
7. Assist the client in doing all that is necessary to verify that the "true" problem is being addressed (high-priority gaps in results) and not merely the symptoms.
8. Identify and report alternate plausible hypotheses that may have lead to, or influenced, the research findings. I will also recognize that biases on the part of the consultant and client can operate as one such alternate plausible hypothesis.
9. Recognize that generalizing from research conducted with one client or project to other contexts carries risks. These risks include the potential fallacy of assuming that a particular treatment can be expected to yield similar results with other populations, interventions, measures, and settings (Cronbach, 1982).
10. Examine and report to the client on alternative solutions as well as alternative approaches and even paradigms that meet performance requirements, even if these alternatives are not processes or products that my organization offers.
11. Do the research required to have adequate knowledge of new methods, concepts, tools, approaches, and technologies that may be beneficial to the client. This includes (a) reading journals inside and outside of the fields of management, training, psychology, business, sociology, performance improvement, and educational research, among others, that might be generalized to performance accomplishment and technology; (b) attending conferences and professional meetings; and

(c) consulting with credible colleagues in the field.

12. Be responsible for the results of my work (this may not be an "all-or-none" relationship; I will take responsibility and credit only for the portion of results that are clearly linked to my efforts).
13. Keep information confidential. I will not publish specific data obtained from engagement with the client or concepts that require identification of the client without the client's consent and review.
14. Not advertise the attainment of results that cannot be clearly linked to my work.
15. Make clear that any correlational relationships between findings do not necessarily imply cause-and-effect relationships. Rather, such causal linkages are best determined on the basis of empirical research and are manifested in the results my client achieves—not merely the processes it engages in.
16. Target the achievement of only those results that can be aligned with both the organization's mission objective, external client value added, and positive contributions to society.
17. Make it known to the client if at any time I reach a point where I am no longer qualified to meet the requirements of the client, if appropriate; assist in locating another specialist; and work with this expert to resolve the problem.
18. Inform clients of any probable decreases in effectiveness and efficiency if my recommendations are scaled up or down by my clients.
19. Never make the client dependent on my services. To lessen this risk, I will make information concerning my procedures available to the client on request.
20. Understand the value of focusing on results and consequences of the results. To that end, my performance will be measured on the results I achieve for the client and not on the procedures I perform for the client.
21. Take on engagements only if in my judgment there is good promise of achieving the desired results that are aligned with both the client's mission objective and positive contributions to external clients and society.
22. Avoid taking on an advisory role unless there are specified responsibilities for which I am qualified to contribute.
23. Reserve the right to take positions or engagements with additional clients (unless prohibited in my contract or if doing so could impair my professional objectivity). My aim is not to focus on the benefit for a particular client, but rather to also achieve positive results that benefit the client organization, external clients, as well as society.
24. Cooperate fully with my clients' requests to partner with individuals or firms representing my own competition, so long as such practice does not violate any of the tenets in this code of professional conduct.
25. Anticipate and prepare for both process and accountability audits of my efforts. To this extent I will maintain records of my procedures, meetings, correspondences, travel, and expenditures, as well as evidence of the usefulness of both my activities and results.
26. Be willing to terminate my contract with the client if there are deviations from this code of professional conduct that the client cannot or will not remedy.

The Responsibilities of the Client

As the client, I will—

27. Provide adequate expert knowledge of my business. Any evidence of dishonest or inaccurate information will result in the termination of the engagement.
28. Arrange for the direct access to the information, people, and resources required for the professional to do his or her job as specified in the agreement.
29. Inform the professional of implementation and results thereof, generated by ideas from their work.
30. Make no changes to the procedures recommended without taking over the responsibility for results (this may not be an "all-or-none" relationship).
31. Have the final decision on the implementation.
32. Publish or print reports regarding the results of the professional's work in full, and not omit any parts without the professional's consent.
33. Not mention verbally, in correspondence, or in print the names of the consultants without their approval.
34. Make explicit the turnaround time for my approval and negotiation of changes to the consultant's deliverables, and meet these deadlines. I understand that any aberration from this approval process will likely affect the remainder of the project's timeline, and for this I will not hold the consultant at fault.
35. Not insist on any solution, process, intervention, or method when there are research and/or performance data to indicate that these will not measurably add value to what my organization uses, does, produces, or delivers and value for external clients and stakeholders.
36. Be willing to terminate my contract with the consultant if there are deviations from this code of conduct which the consultant cannot, or will not, remedy.

Professional Practices

Meeting the requirements of the proposed code of professional conduct will not be an easy task for any of us. We suggest the following tactics as practical steps each of us can take to apply a code of professional conduct to our activities.

	Yes	No
Do you commit to deliver organizational contributions that add value for your external clients AND society?		
Do you commit to deliver organizational contributions that have the quality required by your external partners?		
Do you commit to produce internal results that have the quality required by your internal partners?		
Do you commit to have efficient internal products, programs, projects, and activities?		
Do you commit to create and ensure the quality and appropriateness of the human, capital, and physical resources available?		
Do you commit to deliver activities, methods, and procedures that have positive value and worth?		
Do you commit to deliver the results and accomplishments defined by our objectives?		

Figure 1. Questions All Organizations and Individuals Must Ask and Answer (based on Kaufmann 2000).

Use the code of conduct as a contract discussion check sheet. The responsibilities of the professional as well as the client organization are offered in the code of professional conduct. These responsibilities can be used as a pragmatic checklist when coming to agreement with a potential client or employer. And though at first some of the statements in the code of professional conduct may seem extreme, impractical, or outside the current paradigm of your organization, we suggest that if either party is not willing to meet each of these elements with their professional conduct, then the long-term success of the agreement is in jeopardy from the start.

Use an ideal vision as the starting place for all decision-making. An ideal vision is a measurable statement of the world we are committed to creating for future generations (Kaufman, 1998, 2000). The elements of the ideal vision are based on the collective future to which people from around the world aspire (Kaufman, 1998, 2000; Meadows, 1999). By using this pragmatic approach to direction setting, individuals and organizations can pursue a common objective that is focused on all clients and stakeholders. As an individual or organization makes decisions, implements interventions, and evaluates its own success, it can use the ideal vision as a benchmark of success.

Client satisfaction and financial rewards are not enough to drive long-term success; if it were we would all find jobs in drug trafficking. Rather, we each must define and contribute to the achievement of the future we want to create. And while this may seem idealistic, impractical, and not something you would dare bring to the discussion with a client, if you do not intend to contribute to an ideal vision, just what alternative results do you intend to achieve for your clients, their clients, and our shared communities?

Standardize our language. Unlike many professions, ours seems to be one that competes for definitions. Terms are defined and redefined by authors, words are used interchangeably by practitioners, phrases defined by other professions are used with alternative meaning... and in the end clients are left to merely guess as to what we are referring. A standardized language will help us communicate to clients and society the valuable information we have gained from more than 30 years of research and practice.

Ask some tough questions. Ask both yourself and your clients some tough questions (see Figure 1).

If either you or your client cannot reach agreement on these questions and the code of professional conduct, then we suggest the long-term success of the partnership is unlikely. Making (and documenting) measurable contributions to both the client and the society are the future of our profession. We can continue to use the tactics and tools that have lead to our success in the past, or we adapt what we use, do, produce, and deliver to the fit the new demands of organizations.

An online forum for continuing this dialogue is available at http://www.megaplanning.com.

Endnotes

[1]We urge the identification of a different label for our field. "Human Performance Technology", a term that sucessfully escapes parentage, we believe focuses on too narrow a scope (only human) and uses "technology" to describe the tools (also a narrow and often mechanistic moniker) often applied without reference to the results we work to achieve.

[2]Many elements offered in this code of professional conduct are related to those Edward Deming used to guide his work as a consultant of statistical studies (Deming, 1972) and are based on the Academy of Human Resources Development's Standards on ethics and Integrity (Dean, 1999).

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