# Kindred Todd and the Ethics of OD

Kindred Todd had just finished her master's degree in organization development and had landed her first consulting position with a small consulting company in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The president, Larry Stepchuck, convinced Todd that his growing organization offered her a great opportunity to learn the business. He had a large number of contacts, an impressive executive career, and several years of consulting experience behind him.

In fact, the firm was growing; adding new clients and projects as fast as its president could hire consultants. A few weeks after Todd was hired, Stepchuck assigned her to a new client, a small oil and gas company. "I've met with the client for several hours," he told her. "They are an important and potentially large opportunity for our firm. They're looking to us to help them address some long-range planning issues. From the way they talk, they could also use some continuous quality improvement work as well."

As Todd prepared for her initial meeting with the client, she reviewed financial data from the firm's annual report, examined trends in the client's industry, and thought about the issues that young firms face. Stepchuck indicated that Todd would first meet with the president of the firm to discuss initial issues and next steps.

When Todd walked into the president's office, she was greeted by the firm's entire senior management team. Team members expressed eagerness to get to work on the important issues of how to improve the organization's key business processes. They believed that an expert in continuous quality improvement (CQI), such as Todd, was exactly the kind of help they needed to increase efficiency and cut costs in the core business. Members began to ask direct questions about technical details of CQI, the likely timeframe within which they might expect results, how to map key processes, and how to form quality improvement teams to identify and implement process improvements.

Todd was stunned and overwhelmed. Nothing that Stepchuck said about the issues facing this company was being discussed and, worse, it was clear that he had sold her to the client as an "expert" in CQI. Her immediate response was to suggest that all of their questions were good ones, but that they needed to be answered in the context of the long-range goals and strategies of the firm. Todd proposed that the best way to begin was for team members to provide her with some history about the organization. In doing so, she was able to avert disaster and embarrassment for herself and her company, and to appear to be doing all the things necessary to begin a CQI project. The meeting ended with Todd and the management team agreeing to meet again the following week.

Immediately the next day, Todd sought out the president of her firm. She reported on the results of the meeting and her surprise at being sold to this client as an expert on CQI. Todd suggested that her own competencies did not fit the needs of the client and requested that another consultant—one with expertise in CQI—be assigned to the project.

Larry Stepchuck responded to Todd's concerns: "I've known these people for over ten years. They don't know exactly what they need. CQI is an important buzzword. It's the flavor of the month and if that's what they want, that's what we'll give them." He also told her that there were no other consultants available for this project. "Besides," he said, "the president of the client firm just called to say how much he enjoyed meeting with you and was looking forward to getting started on the project right away."

Kindred Todd felt that Stepchuck's response to her concerns included a strong, inferred ultimatum: If you want to stay with this company, you had better take this job. "I knew I had to sink or swim with this job and this client," she later reported.

As Todd reflected on her options, she pondered the following questions:

- How can I be honest with this client and thus not jeopardize my values of openness and honesty?
- How can I be helpful to this client?
- How much do I know about quality improvement processes?
- How do I satisfy the requirements of my employer?
- What obligations do I have?
- Who's going to know if I do or don't have the credentials to perform this work?
- What if I fail?

After thinking about those issues, Todd summarized her position in terms of three dilemmas: a dilemma of self (who is Kindred Todd?), a dilemma of competence (what can I do?), and a dilemma of confidence (do I like who I work for?). Based on the issues, Todd made the following tactical decisions. She spent two days at the library reading about and studying total quality management and CQI. She also contacted several of her friends and former classmates who had experience with quality improvement efforts.

Eventually, she contracted with one of them to be her "shadow" consultant—to work with her behind the scenes on formulating and implementing an intervention for the client.

Based on her preparation in the library and the discussions with her shadow consultant, Kindred Todd was able to facilitate an appropriate and effective intervention for the client. Shortly after her assignment was completed, she resigned from the consulting organization.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the role of the organization development practitioner. The term OD practitioner applies to three sets of people: individuals specializing in OD as a profession, people from related fields who have gained some competence in OD, and managers having the OD skills necessary to change and develop their organizations or departments. Comprehensive lists enumerate core and advanced skills and knowledge that an effective OD specialist should possess, but a smaller set of basic skills and knowledge is applicable for all practitioners at all levels. These include four kinds of background: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, general consultation skills, and knowledge of OD theory.

The professional OD role can apply to internal consultants who belong to the organization undergoing change, to external consultants who are members of universities and consulting firms or are self-employed, and to members of internal–external consulting teams. The OD practitioner's role may be described aptly in terms of marginality and emotional demands. People with a tolerance for marginal roles seem especially suited for OD practice because they are able to maintain neutrality and objectivity and to develop integrative solutions that reconcile viewpoints among opposing organizational departments. Similarly, the OD practitioner's emotional intelligence and awareness are keys to implementing the role successfully. Whereas in the past the OD practitioner's role has been described as standing at the client end of the continuum from client-centered to consultant-centered functioning, the development of new and varied interventions has shifted the role of the OD professional to cover the entire range of that continuum.

Although OD is still an emerging field, most practitioners have specific training that ranges from short courses and workshops to graduate and doctoral education. No single career path exists, but internal consulting is often a stepping-stone to becoming an external consultant. Because of the hectic pace of OD practice, specialists should be prepared to cope with high levels of stress and the possibility of career burnout.

Values have played a key role in OD, and traditional values promoting trust, collaboration, and openness have been supplemented recently with concerns for improving organizational effectiveness and productivity. OD specialists may face value dilemmas in trying to jointly optimize human benefits and organization performance. They also may

encounter value conflicts when dealing with powerful external stakeholders, such as the government, stockholders, and customers. Dealing with those outside groups may take political skills, as well as the more traditional social skills.

Ethical issues in OD involve how practitioners perform their helping role with clients. As a profession, OD always has shown a concern for the ethical conduct of its practitioners, and several ethical codes for OD practice have been developed by various professional associations. Ethical dilemmas in OD arise around misrepresentation, misuse of data, coercion, value and goal conflict, and technical ineptness.

## NOTES

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## APPENDIX

## Ethical Guidelines for an Organization Development/Human Systems Development (OD/HSD) Professional

Sponsored by the Human Systems Development Consortium (HSDC), a significant integrative effort by Bill Gellermann has been under way to develop "A Statement of Values and Ethics for Professionals in Organization and Human System Development." HSDC is an informal collection of the leaders of most of the professional associations related to the application of the behavioral and social sciences. A series of drafts based on extensive contributions, comments, and discussions involving many professionals and organizations has led to the following version of this statement.

As an OD/HSD Professional, I commit to supporting and acting in accordance with the following guidelines:

### I. Responsibility for Professional Development and Competence

A. Accept responsibility for the consequences of my acts and make every effort to ensure that my services are properly used.

B. Recognize the limits of my competence, culture, and experience in providing services and using techniques; neither seek nor accept assignments outside those limits without clear understanding by the client when exploration at the edge of my competence is reasonable; refer client to other professionals when appropriate.

C. Strive to attain and maintain a professional level of competence in the field, including

1. broad knowledge of theory and practice in
   a. applied behavioral science generally.
   b. management, administration, organizational behavior, and system behavior specifically.
   c. multicultural issues including issues of color and gender.
   d. other relevant fields of knowledge and practice.
2. ability to
   a. relate effectively with individuals and groups.
   b. relate effectively to the dynamics of large, complex systems.
   c. provide consultation using theory and methods of the applied behavioral sciences.
   d. articulate theory and direct its application, including creation of learning experiences for individuals, small and large groups, and for whole systems.

D. Strive continually for self-knowledge and personal growth; be aware that "what is in me" (my perceptions of myself in my world) and "what is outside me" (the realities that exist apart from me) are not the same; be aware that my values, beliefs, and aspirations can both limit and empower me and that they are primary determinants of my perceptions, my behavior, and my personal and professional effectiveness.

E. Recognize my own personal needs and desires and deal with them responsibly in the performance of my professional roles.

F. Obtain consultation from OD/HSD professionals who are native to and aware of the specific cultures within which I work when those cultures are different from my own.

### II. Responsibility to Clients and Significant Others

A. Serve the short- and long-term welfare, interests, and development of the client system and all its stakeholders; maintain balance in the timing, pace, and magnitude of planned change so as to support a mutually beneficial relationship between the system and its environment.

B. Discuss candidly and fully goals, costs, risks, limitations, and anticipated outcomes of any program or other professional relationship under consideration; seek to avoid automatic confirmation of predetermined conclusions, either the client's or my own; seek optimum involvement by client system members in every step of the process, including managers and workers' representatives; fully inform client system members about my role, contribution, and strategy in working with them.

C. Fully inform participants in any activity or procedure as to its sponsorship, nature, purpose, implications, and any significant risk associated with it so that they can freely choose their participation in any activity initiated by me; acknowledge that their choice may be limited with activity initiated by recognized authorities; be particularly sensitive to implications and risks when I work with people from cultures other than my own.

D. Be aware of my own personal values, my values as an OD/HSD professional, the values of my native culture, the values of the people with whom I am working, and the values of their cultures; involve the client system in making relevant cultural differences explicit and exploring the possible implications of any OD/HSD intervention for all the stakeholders involved; be prepared to make explicit my assumptions, values, and standards as an OD/HSD professional.

E. Help all stakeholders while developing OD/HSD approaches, programs, and the like, if they wish such help; for example, this could include workers' representatives as well as managers in the case of work with a business organization.

F. Work collaboratively with other internal and external consultants serving the same client system and resolve conflicts in terms of the balanced best interests of the client system and all its stakeholders; make appropriate arrangements with other internal and external consultants about how responsibilities will be shared.

G. Encourage and enable my clients to provide for themselves the services I provide rather than foster continued reliance on me; encourage, foster, and support self-education and self-development by individuals, groups, and all other human systems.

H. Cease work with a client when it is clear that the client is not benefiting or the contract has been completed; do not accept an assignment if its scope is so limited that the client will not benefit or it would involve serious conflict with the values and ethics outlined in this statement.

I. Avoid conflicts of interest.

1. Fully inform the client of my opinion about serving similar or competing organizations; be clear with myself, my clients, and other concerned stakeholders about my loyalties and responsibilities when conflicts of interest arise; keep parties informed of these conflicts; cease work with the client if the conflicts cannot be adequately resolved.

2. Seek to act impartially when involved in conflicts between parties in the client system; help them resolve their conflicts themselves, without taking sides; if necessary to change my role from serving as impartial consultant, do so explicitly; cease work with the client, if necessary.

3. Identify and respond to any major differences in professionally relevant values or ethics between myself and my clients with the understanding that conditions may require ceasing work with the client.

4. Accept differences in the expectations and interests of different stakeholders and realize that those differences cannot be reconciled all the time.

J. Seek consultation and feedback from neutral third parties in case of conflict between myself and my client.

K. Define and protect the confidentiality of my client–professional relationships.

1. Make limits of confidentiality clear to clients/participants.

2. Reveal information accepted in confidence only to appropriate or agreed-upon recipients or authorities.

3. Use information obtained during professional work in writings, lectures, or other public forums only with prior consent or when disguised so that it is impossible from my presentations alone to identify the individuals or systems with whom I have worked.

4. Make adequate provisions for maintaining confidentiality in the storage and disposal of records; make provisions for responsibly preserving records in the event of my retirement or disability.

L. Establish mutual agreement on a contract covering services and remuneration.

1. Ensure a clear understanding of and mutual agreement on the services to be performed; do not shift from that agreement without both a clearly defined professional rationale for making the shift and the informed consent of the clients/participants; withdraw from the agreement if circumstances beyond my control prevent proper fulfillment.

2. Ensure mutual understanding and agreement by putting the contract in writing to the extent feasible, yet recognize that

a. the spirit of professional responsibility encompasses more than the letter of the contract.

b. some contracts are necessarily incomplete because complete information is not available at the outset.

c. putting the contract in writing may be neither necessary nor desirable.

3. Safeguard the best interests of the client, the profession, and the public by making sure that financial arrangements are fair and in keeping with appropriate statutes, regulations, and professional standards.

M. Provide for my own accountability by evaluating and assessing the effects of my work.

1. Make all reasonable efforts to determine if my activities have accomplished the agreed-upon goals and have not had other undesirable consequences; seek to undo any undesirable consequences, and do not attempt to cover up these situations.

2. Actively solicit and respond with an open mind to feedback regarding my work and seek to improve.

3. Develop, publish, and use assessment techniques that promote the welfare and best interests of clients/participants; guard against the misuse of assessment results.

N. Make public statements of all kinds accurately, including promotion and advertising, and give service as advertised.

1. Base public statements providing professional opinions or information on scientifically acceptable findings and techniques as much as possible, with full recognition of the limits and uncertainties of such evidence.

2. Seek to help people make informed choices when making statements as part of promotion or advertising.

3. Deliver services as advertised and do not shift without a clear professional rationale and the informed consent of the participants/clients.

## III. Responsibility to the Profession

A. Act with due regard for the needs, special competencies and obligations of my colleagues in OD/HSD and other professions; respect the prerogatives and obligations of the institutions or organizations with which these other colleagues are associated.

B. Be aware of the possible impact of my public behavior upon the ability of colleagues to perform their professional work; perform professional activity in a way that will bring credit to the profession.

C. Work actively for ethical practice by individuals and organizations engaged in OD/HSD activities and, in case of questionable practice, use appropriate channels for confronting it, including
   1. direct discussion when feasible.
   2. joint consultation and feedback, using other professionals as third parties.
   3. enforcement procedures of existing professional organizations.
   4. public confrontation.

D. Contribute to continuing professional development by
   1. supporting the development of other professionals, including mentoring with less experienced professionals.
   2. contributing ideas, methods, findings, and other useful information to the body of OD/HSD knowledge and skill.

E. Promote the sharing of OD/HSD knowledge and skill by various means including
   1. granting use of my copyrighted material as freely as possible, subject to a minimum of conditions, including a reasonable price defined on the basis of professional as well as commercial values.
   2. giving credit for the ideas and products of others.

## IV. Social Responsibility

A. Strive for the preservation and protection of fundamental human rights and the promotion of social justice.

B. Be aware that I bear a heavy social responsibility because my recommendations and professional actions may alter the lives and well-being of individuals within my client systems, the systems themselves, and the larger systems of which they are subsystems.

C. Contribute knowledge, skill, and other resources in support of organizations, programs, and activities that seek to improve human welfare; be prepared to accept clients who do not have sufficient resources to pay my full fees at reduced fees or no charge.

D. Respect the cultures of the organization, community, country, or other human system within which I work (including the cultures' traditions, values, and moral and ethical expectations and their implications), yet recognize and constructively confront the counterproductive aspects of those cultures whenever feasible; be sensitive to cross-cultural differences and their implications; be aware of the cultural filters which bias my view of the world.

E. Recognize that accepting this statement as a guide for my behavior involves holding myself to a standard that may be more exacting than the laws of any country in which I practice.

F. Contribute to the quality of life in human society at large; work toward and support a culture based on mutual respect for each other's rights as human beings; encourage the development of love, trust, openness, mutual responsibility, authentic and harmonious relationships, empowerment, participation, and involvement in a spirit of freedom and self-discipline as elements of this culture.

G. Engage in self-generated or collaborative endeavor to develop means for helping across cultures.

H. Serve the welfare of all the people of Earth, all living things, and their environment.