



Lead Teams

Handout 5

Developing Codes of Ethics

Note that if your organization is quite large, e.g., includes several large programs or departments, you may want to develop an overall corporate code of ethics and then a separate code to guide each of your programs or departments.

Also note that codes should not be developed from the Human Resource or Legal departments alone, as is too often done. Codes are insufficient if intended only to ensure that policies are legal. All staff must see the ethics program being driven by top management.

Note that codes of ethics and codes of conduct may be the same in some organizations, depending on the organization's culture and operations and on the ultimate level of specificity in the code(s).

Consider the following guidelines when developing codes of ethics:

- a) All values need to adhere to relevant laws and regulations. If you realise that you are breaking laws whilst developing your code, report them and rectify immediately.
- b) Identify which values produce the top three or four traits of a highly ethical and successful product or service in your area, e.g., for accountants: objectivity, confidentiality, accuracy, etc. Identify which values produce behaviours that exhibit these traits.
- c) Identify values needed to address current issues in your workplace.
Appoint one or two key people to interview key staff to collect descriptions of major issues in the workplace. Collect descriptions of behaviours that produce the issues. Consider which of these issues are ethical in nature, e.g. issues with regard to respect, fairness and honesty. Identify the behaviours needed to resolve these issues. Identify which values would generate those preferred behaviours. There may be values included here that some people would not deem as moral or ethical values, e.g., team-building and promptness, but for managers, these practical values may add more relevance and utility to a code of ethics.
- d) Identify any values needed based on findings during strategic planning.
Review information from your SWOT analysis (identifying the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). What behaviours are needed to build on strengths, shore up weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities and guard against threats?
- e) Consider any top ethical values that might be prized by stakeholders.
For example, consider expectations of employees, clients/customers, suppliers, funders, members of the local community, etc.
- f) Collect from the above steps, the top five to ten ethical values which are high priorities in your organization.
Examples of ethical values might include

- Trustworthiness: honesty, integrity, promise-keeping, loyalty
 - Respect: autonomy, privacy, dignity, courtesy, tolerance, acceptance
 - Responsibility: accountability, pursuit of excellence
 - Caring: compassion, consideration, giving, sharing, kindness, loving
 - Justice and fairness: procedural fairness, impartiality, consistency, equity, equality, due process
 - Civic virtue and citizenship: law abiding, community service, protection of environment
- g) When composing your code of ethics ensure that values are explained by associating examples of behaviour.
- h) Include wording that indicates all employees are expected to conform to the values stated in the code of ethics. Also indicate where employees can go if they have any questions.
- i) Get input from as many members of the organisation as possible, including representatives from all stakeholder groups.
- j) Announce and distribute the new code of ethics along with any new codes of conduct and associated policies and procedures. Ensure each employee has a copy and post codes throughout the facility.
- k) Update the code at least once a year.
Remember! The most important aspect of codes is developing them, not the code itself. Continued dialogue and reflection around ethical values produces ethical sensitivity and consensus. Therefore, revisit your codes at least once a year.
- l) Note that you cannot include values and preferred behaviours for every possible ethical dilemma that might arise. Your goal is to focus on the top ethical values needed in your organization and to avoid potential ethical dilemmas that seem mostly likely to occur.