

The *Competency Profile of Ethics Practitioners*
Produced by the
Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada (EPAC)

An Overview of Context and Content

by

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Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada (EPAC)

EPAC is Canada's only national association of ethics practitioners and includes:

- **ethics officers in private sector corporations, government institutions, and voluntary sector organizations,**
- **consultants to these three types of organizations,**
- **academics teaching ethics practitioners and potential practitioners.**

EPAC has been active since 1996. See www.epac-apec.ca

EPAC's vision is that all Canadian organizations, whether public, private or voluntary, will operate in an exemplary ethical and socially acceptable manner at home and abroad.

EPAC's mission is to enhance the quality and availability of ethics advice and services across Canada.

EPAC's membership is about 200 in the year 2005, residing all across Canada.

EPAC's provides information through electronic bulletins and a Magazine, as well as an extensive website (www.epac-apec.ca) with a Calendar of Events and a List of Members

All EPAC documents are on the website in English and French.

EPAC supports regional activities in cities across Canada; events include seminars, workshops and roundtable discussions on ethics in organizations.

EPAC's members have all signed the *Ethical Standards for Members of EPAC*, available on the website.

EPAC Professional Standards

The following diagram provides an overview of the key documents that have been issued by EPAC with the goal of professionalizing the work of ethics practitioners. Together the documents provide a voluntary self-governing framework for work in this field.



* English and French versions of these documents are available on the EPAC website (www.epac-apec.ca). Note that the Self-Assessment Guide is distributed to members and may be purchased by others (see website for details).

Ethical Standards

Core Values – caring, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness

Responsibility to Clients – serve long-term well-being of clients, conduct relationship honestly and openly, respect confidentiality, avoid conflicts of interest, ...

Personal Responsibility – act with integrity, recognize personal interests and assert them fairly, maintain competence, ...

Responsibility to the Profession – contribute to professional development, promote sharing of knowledge and skill, ...

Application – members must agree to abide by this code

Guidance for Practitioners: The Three-Pronged Program

- 1. A competency profile to identify the standards that a practitioner should aspire to**
- 2. A self-assessment guide to identify any gaps in a practitioner's competencies**
- 3. An inventory of education resources to help the practitioner fill the gaps**

Development of the Competency Profile

The Competency Profile resulted from extensive workshops, consultations, and EPAC Board approvals between 1999 and 2001.

See “How EPAC came to have a Competency Profile of Ethics Practitioners” by C. von Baeyer in *EPAC Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 4-8.

Structure of the Profile

The threshold standard for a competent ethics practitioner to be active in the field is set out in two complementary ways:

- 1. the essential functions that an ethics practitioner carries out, using specific proficiencies**
- 2. the knowledge and skills that an ethics practitioner possesses**

There is also a list of Desirable Personal Traits, which completes the picture of a competent ethics practitioner but is not part of the formal requirements set out above.

Uses of the Profile

The functions are particularly useful for those needing a succinct description of what an ethics officer does, for a manager's purposes in establishing a position, for example.

The knowledge and skills are particularly useful for educators designing learning activities for ethics practitioners, for example.

The whole Profile is designed to help practitioners to present themselves to employers and clients, and to develop their competencies.

Overall Approach

The ethics practitioner helps people to improve their workplace, but primary responsibility for ethical behaviour always remains with the members of the organization.

There is no single accepted standard for values and ethics programs in organizations, but there is an extensive literature with a core set of concepts and a recognized use of language.

Successful ethics programs incorporate and balance an emphasis on values and integrity with the necessary compliance procedures.

Functions of Ethics Practitioners

- 1. Develop ethics programs and initiatives that respond to organizational needs.**
- 2. Develop and implement appropriate ethical standards and processes.**
- 3. Promote ethical leadership and decision-making at all levels of the organization.**
- 4. Provide guidance to empower individuals and organizations to address specific ethical issues and dilemmas.**
- 5. Design and provide advice on social responsibility frameworks.**
- 6. Gain and maintain the respect and trust of clients.**
- 7. As an ethics practitioner, maintain a high level of professional knowledge and expertise for the purpose of applying ethics and values in organizations.**
- 8. As an ethics practitioner, maintain and promote high professional and ethical standards.**

Functions (Detail)

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

Identify the values, mission and goals of organizations and their stakeholders, as well as their management and accountability structures.

Identify strengths, weaknesses, and threats to ethical conduct in the organization.

Identify and communicate differences between ideal ethical standards and existing organizational practices.

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Knowledge (by subject area)

- 1. Ethics theory**
- 2. Management**
- 3. Public expectations**
- 4. Programs, stakeholders and networks**
- 5. Law**
- 6. Related and specialty fields**
- 7. EPAC**

Knowledge (Detail)

1. Ethics theory

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.

Understanding of major ethical theories and their application in advising organizations.

Understanding of ethical decision-making models based on values, principles and moral reasoning.

Understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to ethics, values and morality.

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Skills (by subject area)

- 1. Trust**
- 2. Objectivity and balance**
- 3. Limitations of practitioner and environment**
- 4. Listening**
- 5. Stakeholder focus**
- 6. Dialogue**
- 7. Teamwork and co-operation**
- 8. Transparency and confidentiality**
- 9. Leadership**
- 10. Consulting business, where applicable**
- 11. Applying ethics**
- 12. Analysis**
- 13. Risk**
- 14. Synthesis**
- 15. Advice**
- 16. Formulating**
- 17. Counselling and training**
- 18. Professional development: continuous learning**

Skills (Detail)

4. Listening

Non-judgmental listening as a primary tool for work on ethics.

Drawing out ‘client-driven’ solutions on a broad spectrum of ethics-related issues.

A Note on Desirable Personal Traits

Being a person of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness

Being, and being seen to be, a model of ethical behaviour at work and in private life.

Showing consistency between words and deeds.

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Self-Assessment Guide

For each element in the list of functions, knowledge and skills:

- **provide a rating of your level of achievement (on a 4 point scale)**
- **provide a short statement of the evidence for your assessment**
- **include such means of acquiring the element as:**
 - **on-the-job experience**
 - **formal coursework (taken and taught)**
 - **conferences and workshops (attended and led)**
 - **testimony of colleagues**
 - **self-education**
- **identify specific gaps in your competency**
- **for each gap, specify a learning objective as well as resources and actions that would help you reach the objective**
- **roll up the objectives and resources into a personal action plan**

Inventory of Ethics Education Resources

Listing by province of ethics centres, certificates and diplomas focussing on applied ethics

Listings are limited to courses that ethics practitioners can take without registering for a full program

EPAC members giving on-site ethics training are also listed

See www.epac-apec.ca

Pros and Cons of EPAC's Competency Approach

The Profile is not a job description, or a set of performance indicators, or a curriculum guideline, or a certification tool.

The Profile sets out a high-level standard that can be a very useful tool when developing specific documents for staffing, teaching, etc.

The Profile does not deal with the full range of legal compliance issues – a number of matters would have to be added to create a Competency Profile of Ethics and Compliance Practitioners.

Certification

EPAC has since its inception worked to professionalize the work of ethics practitioners.

However, EPAC has been reluctant to commit to a formal approach to certification, given the costs of establishing tests that can withstand legal challenges, and the small number of practitioners in Canada at this time.

The three-pronged program (competency profile + self-assessment guide + inventory of education resources) is seen as a waystage to further professionalization.

EPAC strongly supports the idea of a variety of educational efforts in the field, perhaps accrediting some as a “gold-standard”.

Partnering with other organizations appears to be the way forward.