

MARRCH Ethics Committee Hosts Round Table Workshop on Advanced Ethics

By Tim Brustad, LADC

The Ethics Committee held a round table workshop concerning complex ethical scenarios at the MARRCH Fall Conference this year. What was it all about and why is that important? As was mentioned in previous Ethics Committee articles, Advanced Ethics is moving beyond “Basic Ethics.” The Ethics Committee has defined Advanced Ethics as “issues that occur related to supervisory ethics, organizational ethics, residential settings or rural locations, as well as dilemmas regarding the events in which legal and ethical directives conflict.”

An example concerning the value of Advanced Ethics:

“Organizations need ethics quality not only to prevent unhealthy behavior but to inspire superior reasoning and performance. It is only through human nature, and ethics, that we can inspire greater levels of innovation, teamwork, and process breakthroughs that result in sustainable advantages. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “Once a person’s mind is expanded by a new idea the mind can never return to its original form.” The same is true with management and ethics. When managers understand how ethics make them better, their role as a manager changes forever. Once ethics is learned, we all acquire the ability to see what we often could not see before. We see that using ethics — **the reasoning science** — to improve individual and group performance is what real organizational ethics are all about.”

The value of Advanced Ethics became very apparent as the workshop broke off into the smaller groups. The groups were invited to utilize one of two processes made available to them. The “Shorter” process, *A Synthetic Process Model for Ethics Decisions* was recommended due to time constraints.

The process outline involved the following:

Stage 1: Interpreting the Situation

Explain the situation. Straightforward: here’s the situation that we are presented with.

Enumerate questions that this situation raises. Basically this is the answer to the

question: What are the problems and issues being faced in the situation?

Determine the major stakeholders.

Stage 2: Formulating an Ethical Decision^{iv}

Discern the possible courses of action.

Generate outcomes: as many positive and negative outcomes as you can think of.

Stage 3: Reaching a Decision

Seek consultation.

Identify for each course of action

- Universal Ethical Values involved,
- Ethical codes and standards that are involved, and
- Competing personal and cultural values involved

Be sure to identify how values or standard may be in conflict or competition and ways to resolve which ones have a “higher” value in this circumstance.

What **legal issues** are involved that could impact the situation?

Explore ways to **resolve the conflicts**.

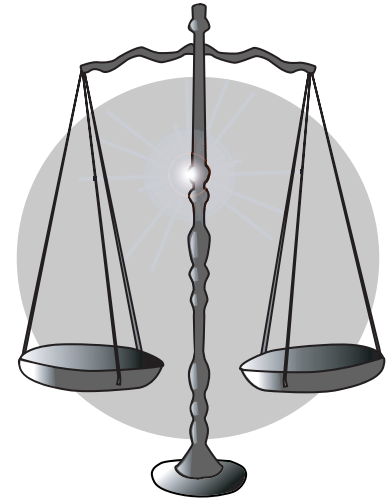
Stage 4: Planning and Executing the Selected Course of Action

Determine a reasonable answer and course of action.

Execute the plan and **document** the results.

Initial feedback and comments regarding the process were positive and indicated that it did work. What I have found reassuring regarding the “field” as a whole is that this process already exists, people are already applying these principles — the *Synthetic Process Model for Ethics Decisions* just helps us by providing a structured outline to follow. With counselor follow-through and application (weekly agency staff meetings) the clients we work with will be better served.

Going forward the ethics committee felt that the scenarios needed to be more specific and we will work to create a better process to improve this. Expanding the workshop in the future will allow more time for explain-



ing the process as well as summarizing at the end. Additional feedback from participants is always welcome!

We want to remind MARRCH members that we are offering ethical consultation; specific situations are currently being submitted. We also plan to offer more workshops in the future; as noted below, volunteers are welcome. Finally, if you would be interested, the Ethics Committee welcomes new members. To be a voting member of the ethics committee one must:

- Be a MARRCH member, either individually or through your organization.
- Attend at least two face-to-face committee meetings per year.
- Participate in e-meetings according to e-meeting expectations.

You may volunteer to participate in specific Committee activities without meeting all these requirements as long as you do not wish to vote. To indicate your interest in committee membership, send e-mail to lcegley@paulbunyan.net. You will then receive procedures for becoming a member. The Ethics Committee holds six face-to-face meetings each year, on the same day as the MARRCH Board of Governors meeting.

Ethics Quality™ for Organizational Excellence
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All Stage identifications are modified considerably from stages in “Integrative Decision-Making Model of Ethical Behavior in Counseling” from *Rehabilitation Counseling: Profession and Practice*. “Developing sensitivity” and “contextual factors” also come from this source.

Basic process of the Stage 2 section is after Schoener, Gary, but the details of the section are modified from Schoener.