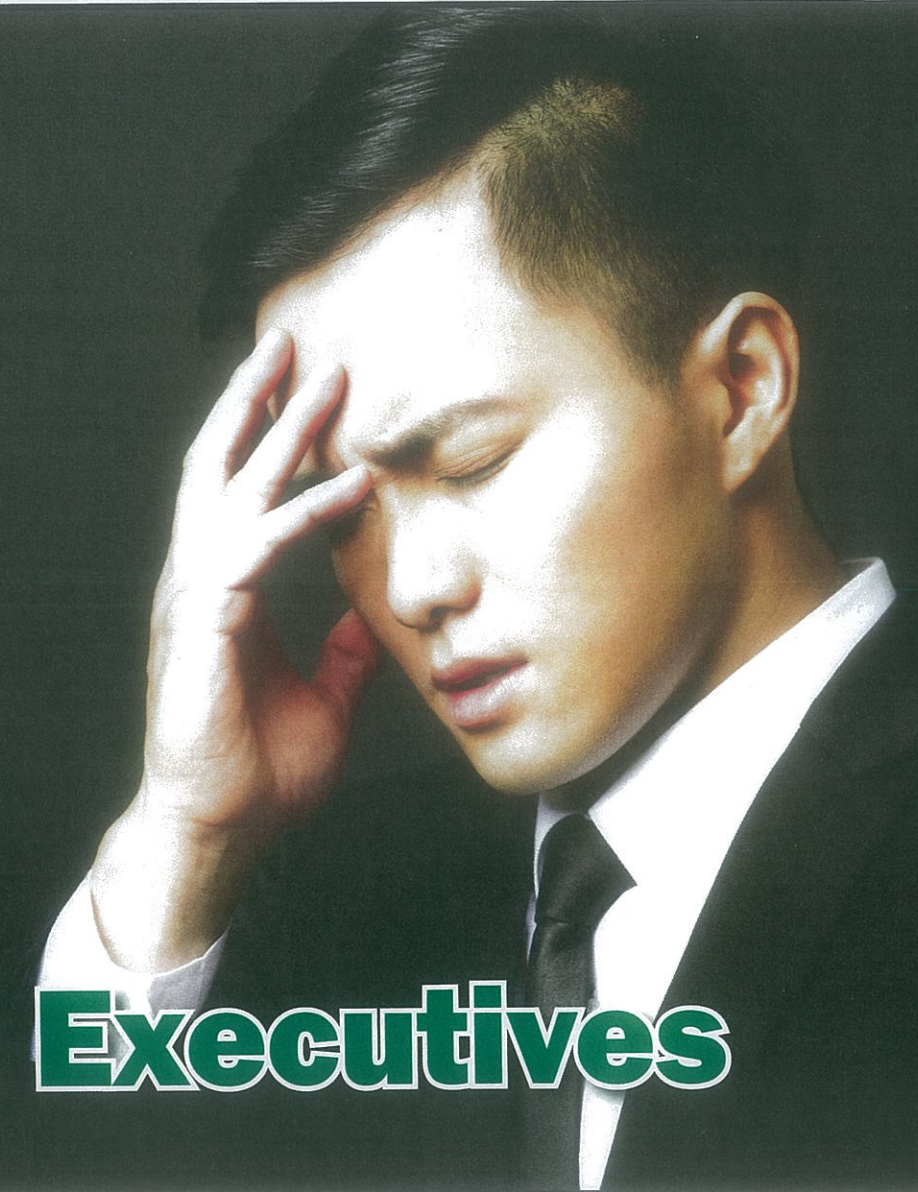


*The Journal of*  
**Employee Assistance**

Working with

**Impaired Executives**

| Page 10



**PLUS:**

**EAPs Around  
the Globe**

Page 14

**Inaugural  
CIR Summit**

Page 18

**Is That an  
Elephant in  
the Room?**

Page 26



## Ethical Decision Making Applied to EAP Consultation

"I believe our long-standing ethical tradition not only offers a viable foothold for continuing to sustain consultation as a critical employee assistance service, but also provides a prospective framework for demonstrating the value of those same consultation services to the work organization as a whole."

| By Bernard E. Beidel, M.Ed., CEAP

In addition to being an essential element of EAP Core Technology, workplace consultation, and especially EAP consultation, is a skill that is not often taught in the clinically-based academic programs from which many people in our profession were trained. For many of us, it is a skill that we learned on the job while "in the trenches" of employee assistance service.

As many EA professionals can attest, this ability centers on learning the nuances of consulting with corporate executives on larger organizational issues, as opposed to the more common instances of consulting with a manager who is struggling with the deteriorating performance of an employee.

The former type of consulting involves becoming adept at walking a tightrope when we are engaged with *both* a labor relations manager *and* a shop steward in the midst of a potential workplace grievance.

As the work organizations we serve and the workplaces we navigate have become more and more complex, often reaching beyond geographic and cultural borders, so too has the consultation process become more dynamic and challenging. Coupled with the escalation of workplace coaching as a viable service to executives, managers and supervisors, it has become more and more difficult to distinguish the

traditional employee assistance consultation process from other methods and methodologies. *However, such a distinction is essential in continuing to foster what is uniquely an employee assistance service.*

### Long-standing Ethical Tradition

I believe our long-standing ethical tradition not only offers a viable foothold for continuing to sustain consultation as a critical employee assistance service, but also provides a prospective framework for demonstrating the value of those same consultation services to the work organization as a whole.

The ethical decision-making model initially developed by EAPA's Houston Chapter 20 years ago was advanced and advocated by EAPA as a viable methodology for resolving ethical dilemmas in EA practice (Rumsey et al, 1996). This model provides a process that is easily adaptable in working through complex and challenging workplace consultations.

This model was largely born out of a focus on the clinical and case management issues faced by EA professionals throughout our history. Its compatibility with ethical decision-making models taught in the business community confirms the integrity of this approach and its utility to EA professionals as a method for offering workplace consultations and as a way of

maintaining uniformity in how we conduct such discussions (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics; Ethics & Compliance Initiative).

### Challenging Consultation Opportunities

Similar to the clinical and case management aspects of the direct services we provide to employees and family members, the services we provide to work organizations – often through the consultation process – are ripe with multiple stakeholders. These parties bring their conflicting interests, needs and wants to the EAP's doorstep. The EA professional, in turn, is challenged to help resolve the process through his or her consultation.

Each consultation opportunity brings a unique set of dynamics, issues, concerns, and potential solutions, all necessitating the EA professional's ability to probe, assess, strategize, and consult – often on the fly and with little or no advance notice. Few would probably disagree with the notion that this is one of the most exciting and dynamic interventions and services that we deliver within EAP Core Technology.

But at the same time, these are also challenging situations that beg for a process of getting from the initial contact to a workable solution. *Over the years I have found that the ethical*

*decision-making model is a helpful framework for navigating that process.*

### EAP Ethical Decision-Making Model

Although the model focuses on ethics, I have found that its progressive steps still apply to the consultation process. A brief overview of this model will demonstrate its practical utility as well as offer suggestions on how I have applied it to the consultation process over the years.

#### 1. What are the potential (ethical) issues in this situation?

- What are the competing values or interests? (x vs. y)
- What are your personal values on this issue and which ones are in conflict?
- Are there any ethical guidelines (laws, corporate policies, codes of ethics, practice standards, etc.) that apply to this issue?

#### 2. Who are the stakeholders (any individual or group impacted by the decision; e.g., the corporation, employee, family, public, yourself)?

- #### 3. List all possible choices of action:
- Which choice benefits the client?
  - Which choice benefits the sponsoring organization?
  - Which choice benefits you?
  - Which choice benefits society?

#### 4. Make your decision.

### Application to EAP Consultation Process

#### 1. Fact-gathering:

- What are the facts that are being presented?
- How has the person defined their problem or need for consultation?

- What questions can I pose that will lead me to a fuller understanding of the situation?
- What is the interest of the person that has contacted me?
- What do they expect of me through this consultation? A sounding board? A solution?
- Do I bring any biases to this consultation?
- Are there applicable policies, practices, procedures, laws, etc. that I need to consider as I consult with the person and guide them to a solution?

#### 2. Key parties involved in the situation:

- Besides the person I am consulting with, who else will be impacted by the course of action we devise?
- Does the organization, company or union provide a context that I must consider in working through the consultation with this individual?
- Have any previous EAP consultations set any precedents applicable to this situation?

#### 3. Evaluation of possible course of action in response to the consultation:

- Have I adequately engaged the person in generating potential solutions or possible courses of action?
- Has my consultation helped the person weigh the possible consequences or outcomes of the action?
- Have I helped equip, prepare or coach the person to follow through with the solution or action we have agreed upon?

#### 4. Final solution or action:

- Is there anything else that I should know that might lead me to advocate that the person

consider a different course of action or solution?

While the questions I pose in this model are not exhaustive, I have found them to be a powerful catalyst in moving both myself and the person I am consulting through a defined and deliberate process designed to lead to a desirable outcome.

I have also found this process to be a valuable way of documenting what often appears to be a hazy situation, by serving as a helpful framework for weighing and assessing the actual results of the consultations. *It is my hope that this process and the questions I listed will serve to ignite additional queries for your own use in developing a consultation methodology.*

Continued on page 30

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### Consistency and Value

I believe that applying a decision-making model with demonstrated success in resolving ethical dilemmas brings both *consistency* to EAP consultations as well as being of considerable *value* to corporate clients. Considering that an overwhelming number of the EAP consultations we provide are delivered to executives, managers, supervisors, union officials, and other organizational leaders and change agents, adhering to a proven model that logically progresses a person through their situation also serves to “model” an approach for the *individuals* in organizations who encounter *their own* consultation needs and ethical dilemmas.

In other words, this model works in both organizational and in individual cases. Whether it’s dealing with an organizational, operational, administrative, technical, or other challenge, people often tend to find themselves in similar circumstances

as they seek a solution to their problem. I am confident that talking a person through a consultation process subtly teaches that process at the same time. To me this gets to the heart of the value of consultation.

### Summary

While EAP utilization reports are often framed largely within the parameters of direct employee assistance services to employees and family members, the ability to define, articulate and follow a consistent consultation methodology from fact-gathering to solution provides structure to a core EAP service. *However, this process is not rigid as it still offers the flexibility to follow the consultation “where it leads,” and not where one might have assumed it would end.*

I believe the EAP Ethical Decision-Making Model speaks to the value that EA professionals bring to organizations through workplace consultations. It’s true that this value

is difficult to quantify in a utilization report, but it is one that can fundamentally change and enhance the way executives, managers, supervisors, union officials and other leaders grapple through challenges, responsibilities and dilemmas. ❖

*Bernard Beidel is the Director of the Office of Employee Assistance at the U.S. House of Representatives and former EACC Commissioner. He wishes to acknowledge his fellow EAPA Ethics Education Panel members – Judy Cantwell, Lisa Cooper-Lucas, Henri Menco, David Nix, Rebecca Williams, and Jan Price – for the inspiration for this article, which grew out of the panel’s “Ethics and EAP Consultation” workshop conducted at EAPA’s 2014 World EAP Conference in Orlando, Florida.*

### References

- Rumsey, M.; Christie, J. (1996). *Ethical Dilemmas in Workplace Counseling: A Casebook*. Houston.
- Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, [www.scu.edu/ethics](http://www.scu.edu/ethics).
- Ethics & Compliance Initiative. *The PLUS Decision Making Model – Six Steps to Ethical Decision Making*, [www.ethics.org/home](http://www.ethics.org/home).

Discussion focused on the five-tier WOS that was used in a worldwide assessment of DuPont’s EAP services in 2014. Key questions related to the five WOS constructs (absenteeism, presenteeism, engagement, life satisfaction, and workplace distress) were asked at intake and 60- and 90-day post intake intervals. Mollenhauer presented statistical evidence of improvements in each of these five areas in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States.

The DuPont EAP used the “super short” 5-item version that focused on workplace factors, and was not clinical in nature,

Mollenhauer stressed. He pointed out that the WOS is offered free of charge to EAPs with a signed licensed agreement. To date, thousands of EAP users have utilized the WOS.

➤ Led by Tom Shjerven, Stan Granberry, and Konstantin von Vietinghoff, *Forecasting Global EAP Trends* discussed an inclusive view of the current international EAP market. Anticipating future global market trends was also examined. Shjerven pointed out that EA professionals from over 40 countries were attending the World EAP Conference. “There is more mobility than ever,

which is good, but it also leads to more stress,” he said. Shjerven cited several global EAP trends:

- There is a growing appreciation of how physical and mental health impact productivity and the bottom line.
  - There is a growing circle of impact related to security lapses, natural disasters, political unrest, suicides and workplace violence.
- “All told, when it comes to EAP services in other countries, it’s ultimately all about understanding that particular culture and EAP using the local resources that are available to them,” Shjerven stressed. ❖