

# Continuing Professional Education: Exploring an Integral Framework on People Development

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## ABSTRACT

Education focuses on developing smart and good persons. Extended to the professions, it takes the form of continuing professional education (CPE) or development (CPD) which aims to enhance both the technical competence and personal character of professionals. In practice, it is easier to acquire skills than to develop positive attitudes and ethical values that shape an individual's character. Nonetheless, the latter is as important as the former. Recent Wall Street scandals and corporate fiascos have underscored the need for ethical values such as integrity, honesty, prudence and justice. Being an expert in a given field or graduating from the world's top business school does not automatically transform one into an ethical person. On the other hand, people who commit themselves to professional development, and practice diligently and consistently ethical values acquire the corresponding virtues which, in turn, mold their good character.

How can professional associations contribute to strengthening ethics in the workplace and restoring public confidence in the professions? Besides updating members on current issues, initiating competence-building and performance-enhancement activities, professional associations should take more seriously the ethics training and character development of their members. This is practical and feasible since most professional associations already have core values which they espouse. What they have to do is to ensure that their members understand the principles, and commit themselves to internalizing and externalizing these values in daily life. This is an ideal which professional associations can pursue.

This paper proposes an integral or holistic framework for the CPE programs of professional associations. An integral, whole-person CPE also needs to focus on other dimensions such as: wellness programs to address the physiological needs of professionals; emotional intelligence workshops to help professionals master their interpersonal relationships; discussions and guidelines on workplace ethics and spirituality, and work-life balance to satisfy employees' spiritual needs.

This research focuses on a few cases of professional associations and their CPE practices. It uses the proposed framework on pursuing human resource development of association members to classify CPE practices. CPE practices that address expertise and ethics and personal character are identified and recommended as key result areas for professional associations.

## INTRODUCTION

Integral education is a lifelong process. It must be actively pursued both as a personal goal and a common good shared by members of an organization or professional association. By seriously pursuing CPE, professionals clearly discern what their respective professions demand them *to be* and what their clients or employers expect them *to do*.

Professional associations exist "to advance and protect the interests of a profession and to offer services to its members (e.g., certification, publications, educational opportunities)" (Werner & DeSimone, 2009: 304). "The main way professional associations provide continuing education opportunities is by sponsoring conferences, meetings, and workshops

for their members.... One of the primary benefits of these events is the opportunity to meet and share experiences with other professionals” (Werner & DeSimone, 2009: 306).

CPE or CPD “can be defined as the systematic maintenance and improvement of knowledge, skills and competence, and enhancement of learning, undertaken by a person throughout his or her working life” (Guest, 2007: 9). In addition, “Planned and structured CPD is vital for survival and prosperity in an increasingly litigious society, where professional ethics and codes of conduct are firmly, and rightly, in the spotlight and where the professions themselves must never lose sight of the fact that their prime purpose is to act for the public good” (Guest, 2007: 9). In order to uphold the public good, CPE practices and initiatives of professional associations must help their members to act ethically and acquire good moral character.

CPE must be oriented towards genuine people development – understood as “getting the right values into their hearts, getting the right skills into their hands, and placing the right ideas in into their minds” (Estanislao, 1995). Carballo (1991) also refers to this genuine people development as instilling both the “right work habits” and a “unified set of moral principles” among people. He asserts “that good work habits or competence alone do not distinguish a true professional. These must, above all, be accompanied and perfected by genuine moral values and virtues, among them: respect for the dignity and rights of every person, sincere and selfless spirit of service to others, responsible dominion over material things, respect for legitimate authority and for the dignity of human sexuality, love for the truth, love of God” (Carballo, 1991: 4-5). Guided by these principles, CPE assumes a more integral approach that encourages both technical and ethical competence among professionals.

## **AN INTEGRAL FRAMEWORK FOR PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT**

The etymology of education suggests that it is more than just transmitting information from the trainer/teacher to the students (Bellah *et al.*, 1992). Besides instruction, education also entails drawing out the best in people. Forbes asserts: “Education enables us not only to gain knowledge but also to develop sound character, to discover our God-given talents, to lead honorable lives, to become truly good parents, neighbors and citizens” (1991:1).

While business and the workplace highly regard technical competence in the fulfillment of duties, some authors also insist on the equal importance of integrity or character excellence (Lennick and Kiel 2005; Estanislao 1995; Paine 1994; Kouzes and Posner 1993; Covey 1992) Professional development should go in tandem with the ethical and character development. The technical thrust of CPE needs to be balanced by its ethical and whole-person dimension.

Competence in the context of this paper is understood as the technical knowledge, skills and expertise pertinent to a given profession which translates into effective work performance. Character, on the other hand, refers to the “human” side of the professional – his moral, ethical values, attitudes and virtues which are externalized in virtuous behavior.

On the competence side of the CPE framework (see Table 1), *updating* is the most basic and common initiative. It covers information pertaining to the technical aspects of a given profession. Professionals upgrade their knowledge about the developments, current trends, and best practices in their field. Updating “provides practicing professionals with a level of knowledge comparable to those professionals graduating from professional schools. In other words, it closes the gap created by changes in technology, science, and skills between these two generations of professionals” (Nasseh 1996: 2).

Updates prepare professionals for *competence-building*. They identify their key areas of development, especially technical skills which will enable them to do their tasks effectively and productively. In this regard, a thorough training needs analysis of members of a professional association will be needed in designing and developing relevant CPE programs

**TABLE 1: CPE/CPD FRAMEWORK**

<b>ETHICS &amp; CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT</b> →		<b>INFORMATION</b> (Awareness of Ethical values) ⇨	<b>FORMATION</b> (Internalization & Commitment to virtue) ⇨	<b>TRANSFORMATION</b> (Externalization of core values and virtues through personal behavior )
<b>COMPETENCE * EXPERTISE</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE-ENHANCEMENT</b> (Effectively use skills to improve work performance)			The IDEAL spot: CPE that enhances performance & develops ethical characters
	<b>↑ COMPETENCE-BUILDING</b> (Acquire & enhance technical skills)			
	<b>↑ UPDATING</b> (Broaden stock knowledge about profession)	The MINIMUM spot: CPE that updates technical knowledge & informs people of core ethical values		

CPE programs that successfully transfer learning help association members to enhance their work performance. The *performance-enhancement* stage is anchored on “the act of performing a job efficiently, skillfully, and completely” (Nasseh 1996: 6). The knowledge and skills learned from seminars and workshops deliver the expected results in the workplace. Regular performance appraisals can capture employee improvements due to CPE activities.

While all organizations value the knowledge and skills of their employees, they have to harness as well the values and attitudes of their people. Proper attention must be given to ethical and character development.

In harnessing *ethical and character dimension* of the CPE framework (see Table 1), the set of core values adopted by professional associations can be used as the starting point. These values may serve as the key result areas for the professional and personal development of association members. Integrity, for instance, is a value common to many associations. Lennick and Kiel (2005: 79-91) identify specific competencies related to integrity, which could be relevant to the discussion on CPE: *acting consistently with principles; telling the truth; standing up for what is right; and keeping promises.*

Core values specify the behaviors and actions that are favorable to achieving the organizational vision and mission. They define the type of culture an organization wants to nurture. Likewise, they suggest the excellent habits which people should internalize and eventually externalize in their personal behavior. In this regard, Leung *et al.* (2006: 6) cite the qualities of excellent professionals, as follow: *act in the public interest; courage to do what is right; maintaining one’s own credibility and that of the profession; maintaining confidentiality; autonomy; ability to consider broader social and sustainability issues; exercising due professional care; maintaining adequate professional standards and competence; objectivity; integrity; respecting the rights of stakeholders with informed consent; respect for the professions; being an advocate of professional ethics; and advancing the profession’s interest e.g. quality of the “brand”*

The qualities above are an excellent material for the *information* stage of the CPE framework. Information deals with expounding on the core values of the organization, ensuring that they are shared by everyone. This entails integrating them into the HRD programs of professional associations. Thus, members realize the relevance and importance of the core values in their professional field. Likewise, their personal value system is affirmed, enabling them to behave more ethically.

Values or ethical formation programs begin with the intent of making people aware about the core values an organization espouses. Goodpaster (1989) refers to this essential task as orienting wherein a certain moral assessment of the corporate environment is made.

On the merits of shared values, Deal and Kennedy (1988: 22) comment: "If employees know what their company stands for, if they know what standards they are to uphold, then they are much more likely to make decisions that will support those standards. They are also more likely to feel as if they are an important part of the organization. They are motivated because life in the company has meaning for them."

The next stage, *formation*, implies the personal assimilation and ownership of ethical values. The more palpable a professional association's commitment is to its espoused values and code of ethics, the greater interest it would have in molding the attitudes and behaviors of its members. The main purpose of CPE initiatives at this stage is to help people internalize and commit themselves to the personal demands of the core values.

Berkowitz (1995: 26) highlights four broad guidelines in the internalization of ethical values: "They must be made explicit, must be endorsed by the authorities [...], must be modeled by the adults [...], and must be enforced." These guidelines ensure the tension needed in sustaining values awareness.

Eliciting commitment to ethical values is what Goodpaster (1989: 223) refers to as *institutionalization*. "How can these values be made part of the operating consciousness of the company? How can they gain the attention and the allegiance of middle management and other employees?" Institutionalization can be effectively carried out through the following: "decisive actions, a statement of standards with regular audits, and appropriate incentives."

When core values and attitudes are imbibed in a habitual and stable manner, the *transformation* stage sets in. Aided by the right values, positive attitudes and virtues, people are better disposed to making judicious moral decisions which affect their personal and professional life (Alzola 2008). A firmer commitment and a more positive attitude toward virtuous behavior enable people to live more ethically. Professional associations who recognize the exemplary behavior of people in their field encourage such transformation. This means they envision their members to be both technically competent and endowed with excellent character.

When designing and developing CPE activities, professional associations should consider the following questions:

- Are we focusing on enhancing both expertise (competence) and ethics (character) in our HRD programs and activities?
- How can we integrate our core ethical values in our skill-building activities – updating, competence-building or performance-enhancement programs?
- What HRD interventions should we introduce to ensure the internalization of our core ethical values?
- How can we support better our members to externalize the core ethical values they are committed to?
- What should we do to help our members develop an integral character, live balanced and healthy lives, and foster excellent relationships among colleagues?

Skills and knowledge relevant to one's work are *conditio sine qua non* to working well. Moral or ethical values, on the other hand, set the tone for the proper use of these skills and knowledge as they enlighten people about how things ought to be done. No genuine professional development can take place without the corresponding personal development. In effect, good persons have better chances of becoming better professionals.

The CPE/CPD framework underscores the importance of ethical values and character. While skills and knowledge are needed for upgrading expertise and professionalism, values – especially the ethical or moral – have to be fostered by professional associations for the total and holistic development of members.

Ethical formation empowers people to be more productive in the enterprise. Driscoll *et al.* affirm: "Ethics provides employees at all levels with the leadership skills they need as organizations require autonomous decision making from them. [...]" The authors add: "Training in ethics provides employees with a deeper sense of moral awareness and gives them tools to make intelligent ethical business decisions. This training is needed more than ever before when moral education at home, in school, or in religious institutions is lacking" (Driscoll *et al.* 1995: 234).

## ETHICS AND PROFESSIONS AUSTRALIA

Professions Australia (PA) is an association of professional associations in Australia. It sees itself as "a champion for the professions in promoting professionalism and ethics for the benefit of the community" (Leung *et al.* 2006). A study of Leung *et al.* (2006) explored the ethical threats faced by members of various professional associations under PA. Table 2 summarizes these threats.

**TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF ETHICAL THREATS AND EXAMPLES VIA PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

THREATS	EXAM PLES	PROFESSIONS
Self-interest	Inadequate fees charged Influence of commercial parties Promoting discount buying	Accounting Engineering Radiography, Pharmacy Pharmacy, Audiology
Self-review Advocacy	Reviewing application where there is direct interest Self-review of professional education standards or programs attended Advocate for peers within company Protecting the wrong advice when given to patients Influence of media and advertising Advocate of price rather than quality Advocate to bias research findings	Town Planning Pharmacy, Accounting Legal Practice, Computing Health Pharmacy Engineering Dental
Familiarity	Privacy concerns where one has the knowledge of conditions which might compromise quality of service Tenders involving related people	Pharmacy Town Planning, Accounting
Intimidation	Personality of senior executives who bully others Physical intimidation Employee confidentiality contracts to prevent from speaking out	Accounting Pharmacy, other health professions Engineering

Source: Leung *et al.* 2006

Leung *et al.* (2006: 8) cited among the causes of the ethical threats as “failure to recognise the ethical dimensions of situations” and “lack of professional education and knowledge”. The focus groups they conducted to produce the study also suggested safeguards against the threats. Among these are: *continuing professional development programs; ethics education and development initiatives; promotion of an understanding between ethics and standards amongst professionals; enforcement of the code of conduct; and mentoring support, especially for young professionals*

These measures support the case for CPE initiatives that create greater ethical awareness and commitment among members of professional associations. They also advocate the development of an ethical character among professionals with the support of suitable mentors and guidance given by codes of professional conduct. In broad terms, these measures support the ethical and character development dimension of the integral framework for CPE, especially at the information stage. Moreover, if mentoring support is consistently given to professionals who, in turn, diligently practice their learnings, formation and personal transformation may also be achieved.

Werner and DeSimone (2009: 306) state that “another way professional associations try to keep their members current is by publishing journals, magazines, and newsletters that communicate ideas and practices in the field.” The work of Leung *et al.* (2006) done for Professions Australia is a good example of an initiative wherein updating, ethical information and formation are achieved. This would especially be the case if the report is widely disseminated and discussed among the member professional associations under the PA umbrella.

Leung *et al.* (2006:8-9) recommend the development of an ethics education framework to ensure:

- *Professional members understand the nature and expectations of a profession, including the public interest and other professional qualities*
- *Appropriate knowledge and skills are learned to equip professional members in managing ethical threats*
- *A system of continuing education and training be set in place to foster ethical judgment and behavior*
- *Member associations [of PA] be provided with practical recommendations of institutional strategies and structural issues*
- *A joint effort to enhance the promoting and maintaining ethical behaviour be undertaken*

In pursuing the objectives above, the CPE/CPD framework can serve as a conceptual map for identifying specific initiatives that uphold competence/expertise and ethical/character development among professionals. An excellent ethics training program, in particular, can achieve the three dimensions of ethical/character development. Life-altering interventions in training can transform one’s mediocre ethical behavior into an exemplary and edifying conduct. Lennick and Kiel (2005:182) recommend training especially for top management: “Training is the key to reinforcing values and enhancing moral competencies. Senior executives may act allergic to training sessions in the misguided belief that they are finished products who don’t need further education. But values start at the top, so senior level managers need to hone their moral judgment just like the rest of the workforce.”

## **CPA AUSTRALIA AND CPE INITIATIVES**

Members of CPA Australia (2009) have 600 online courses to choose from in order to upgrade their knowledge and skills on various business topics. Its website also contains 30 pages of sundry topics under conferences and congresses (such as public practice, ethics, and asset management) to help members upgrade their competence and expertise and earn CPD hours as well. The more than 122,000 members of CPA Australia are expected to

engage in CPD every year. 120 CPD hours are required every three years. Its website says the following about CPD:

"Members have a professional obligation to themselves, their employer and to the community to plan and participate in a tailored continuing education program. These obligations have mandatory compliance for all members, regardless of industry or position held.

"The underlying principal of CPD is that it should contribute to improving ability to undertake a job by extending knowledge and skills. This is in addition to the normal employment requirements and aims to ensure members are up to date and provided with a competitive advantage in their chosen area." (CPA Australia 2009)

CPA Australia also has the unique Mentor Program to help associate members grow their skills and competence in the field. Moreover, it accredits post-graduate courses in which members may specialize in one of eight areas, namely: auditing, external reporting, financial planning, information technology, insolvency and reconstruction, management accounting, taxation and treasury. All these supports enable members to achieve the three stages of the competence/expertise dimension of the CPE framework.

CPA Australia members are expected to faithfully adhere to the code of ethics of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board (APESB). In practicing their profession, they have to abide by the principles of *integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behavior*. The association's conferences on ethics and corporate governance assist members in enhancing their ethical intelligence and competence. Moreover, members may also avail of the free ethics counseling service which CPA Australia offers through the St James Ethics Centre in Sydney. These CPE ethics activities and services are good examples of initiatives addressing the information, formation and transformation stages of ethics and character development in the CPE framework. Although the content of CPA Australia's CPE/CPD initiatives are predominantly expertise-oriented, it is implicit that the association's ethical values are integrated in their skill building activities.

## CONCLUSION

The proposed CPE/CPD framework encourages professional associations to equally address the technical and ethical needs of their members. People development in professional associations has to be carried out in both technical and ethical spheres. Competent and ethical professionals bring honor and respect to their persons and professions. They contribute more to organizational growth and to the social common good.

Ethical training and character development in CPE contribute to the institutionalization of ethics in the professional associations. An ethical culture helps people to develop and acquire virtues, enabling them to work and live ethically.

The CPE initiatives of Professions Australia and CPA Australia lend support to the practicability and relevance of the CPE/CPD framework. CPA Australia, in particular, has various activities that update the technical knowledge of members, build their competence, and enhance their work performance. From the ethics and character development angle, it also has supporting mechanisms to keep members ethically informed and strengthen their commitment to the ethical principles inherent in both the association's ethical code and the CPA profession.

The commitment to an integral or holistic CPE/CPD varies among associations. The case of CPA Australia, notwithstanding potential areas of improvement in its ethical initiatives, can serve as a benchmark for many professional associations. And the proposed CPE/CPD framework can serve as tool for orienting an integral approach to people development.

An integral, whole-person CPE also needs to focus on other dimensions such as: wellness programs to address the physiological needs of professionals; emotional intelligence

workshops to help professionals master their interpersonal relationships; discussions and guidelines on workplace ethics and spirituality, and work-life balance to satisfy employees' spiritual needs.

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