For professionals, ethical principles are agreed-upon “shoulds” or “oughts” that serve as guidelines for the basis of interactions with a specific clientele (Corey, 2001). Whereas morality deals with conformity to accepted rules of right or wrong according to a particular worldview, ethics deals with guidelines which are used as a basis for decision-making when dealing with human interaction (Cottone and Tarvydas, 1998). Both ethics and morals involve judgments about what is appropriate and/or inappropriate and both apply to the affairs of human conduct. For professionals, ethical conduct is likely to be greatly influenced by their world view, whether it is religious or secular (Remley and Herlihy, 2001).

The goal of this paper is to present the Code of Ethics that was developed by the Standards and Guideline Initiative for Career Development Practitioners (Standards and Guidelines Initiative, 2001). The author describes the ethical values and attitudes within which to contextualize the Code of Ethics, followed by a discussion of the specific guidelines and the decision-making model as developed by this initiative. The paper ends with an example from practice and illustrates the application of the first four phases of the decision-making model.

**Professional Practice**

Typical of all helping professions, there are a number of key value statements which ground the practice of human interaction (Remley and Herlihy, 2001). The first of these refers to an attitude termed intentionality, which suggests that practitioners conduct their practice with good intentions in that they want to do what they consider to be right for their clients. The second statement represents a number of principles which are held basic to working with people. These principles include respecting the freedom of the individual to make choices (autonomy); not intentionally doing harm (nonmaleficence) but instead, intentionally being helpful to people (beneficence); dealing with people in a fair (fidelity) and honest manner (veracity), and being faithful during the helping process (faithfulness). The third statement holds that a knowledge of ethical, legal, and professional standards is expected of helping professionals. This statement recognizes that practice takes place within a cultural and community context and practitioners need to be cognizant and supportive of this context. Another value statement emphasizes the skills and ability to apply knowledge of ethical, legal and professional standards to issues which arise in the helping process. The last value statement focuses on the courage of the practitioner to act with conviction. The practitioner is responsible to behave ethically with their clients and colleagues. When dilemmas arise, the practitioner, after reaching a decision about the ethical thing to do must act with the courage of their decisions.

**Approaches to Ethics**

There are two typical approaches to ethics: one is principle ethics and the other is virtue ethics (Remley and Herlihy, 2001). Principle ethics is based on a number of principles or guidelines which members of the helping profession should use to guide their professional practice and seeks answers to the question “What should I do?”. Virtue ethics holds that practitioners need to be individuals with high principles and seeks answers to the question “Who should I be?”. Principle ethics has six guidelines which are considered core value statements which guide the behaviour of practitioners. These value statements include autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity and veracity (Remley and Herlihy, 2001).

Virtue ethics suggests that practitioners should be individuals who have the following personal characteristics (Remley and Herlihy, 2001). Practitioners should be individuals of integrity and be concerned with doing what is right because they believe the action is right. Practitioners should display discernment, demonstrate the ability to tolerate ambiguity, and be cognitive complex in that they are able to maintain different perspectives as well as project the implications of present behaviour to future consequences. Practitioners should acknowledge the role of emotions in ethical decision-making; they should be aware of their assumptions, biases, and beliefs and how these may influence their relationships with others. Lastly practitioners should display an attitude of interdependence with the cultural and environmental context within which they interact and to which they are responsible.

**Purposes of Codes of Ethics**

Codes of ethics serve a number of purposes (Corey, 2001). Codes of ethics serve to educate practitioners as well as the public about the responsibilities of practitioners. They serve as a basis for making judgments when individuals or practitioners feel they have not been dealt with appropriately. Codes of ethics have an educative value for the
practitioner and encourage self-reflection in a manner which help practitioners to improve their practice. Ideally all practitioners should aspire to ethical behaviour and not view codes as mandatory (Corey, 2001). Such aspirations would serve practitioners and the public well. By holding such an attitude, practitioners would be free from the perspective that ethics are strict rules with which they have to comply, and if not, they will experience unwanted consequences. Practitioners need to view codes of ethics as guidelines which help them provide quality service to their clientele.

**The Code of Ethics for Career Development Practitioners**

The Code as developed by the Standards and Guidelines Initiative (2001) has four principle components: ethical principles for professional competency, ethical principles for practitioners-client relationships, ethical principles for professional relationships and the decision-making model.

Ethical principles for professional competency deals with nine guidelines which focus on the practitioner and reflect a virtue ethics perspective. There are four guidelines focusing on the personal attributes of the practitioner: valuing and developing a high standard of professional competence (1.a.), commitment to life-long learning to maintain high standards (1.b.), recognition of and practicing within one’s level of competence (1.c.), and providing respect and advocacy for the rights and dignity of all clients (1.g.). There are five guidelines dealing with the practitioner’s relationship with others. Practitioners should represent themselves in an honest manner and not claim qualifications or connections that they do not have (1.d.), they should employ high standards in advertising their services (1.e.) and they should be committed to helping agencies or offices to provide the best possible service by adhering to the standards as espoused by this code of ethics (1.f.). Practitioners should provide clients with accurate, and current information about the themselves as well as labour market information when employing the use of information and communication technology (1.i.) and they should be knowledgeable and abide by the code as well as municipal, provincial and federal laws and regulations which impinge on carrying out their duties (1.h.).

Ethical principles for practitioner-client relationships contains six guidelines. Three guidelines deal with aspects of the practitioner-client relationship. Practitioners should not impose their values on their clients, but instead, should strive to help clients realize their potential by providing them with accurate information, and by respecting the client’s right to self-determination (2.a.). Practitioners should inform clients about the provision of and limits to confidentiality (2.b.). Further, they are responsible to inform clients about the use of information collected during the relationship including the provision of confidentiality, legal and institutional regulations and the type of service provided (2.d.). The remaining guidelines in this section focus on parameters around the practitioner relationship when dealing with others outside the relationship concerning the client. One guideline outlines the circumstances under which confidential information should be released (2.c.). Another guideline focuses on avoiding conflicting relationships with clients such that honest and objective services are provided (2.e.). The last guideline deals with disclosing and avoiding any conflict of interest with clients which may influence the provision of appropriate levels of service (2.f.).

Ethical principles for professional relationships deals with the practitioner’s professional relationships of other practitioners. There are two guidelines under this section. The first deals with right of the practitioner to consult with other professionals while ensuring the client’s anonymity (3.a.). The second guideline deals with respect for other professionals by making full use of the resources and services they provide as well as informing them when concerns are raised about their provision of service (3.b.).

The last section of the code describes a decision-making model, one which helps practitioners make ethical decisions. The model is a five phase one which incorporates both rational and affectual information in ethical decision-making. In the first phase, the practitioner recognizes that an ethical dilemma exists. This awareness may be cued by an emotional response when dealing with clients or when the practitioner faces a situation and is uncertain about what action to follow. During the second phase, the practitioner identifies the relevant issues for all parties involved as well as the guidelines of the code that are implicated. Thirdly, the practitioner analyzes the risks and benefits about each alternative route of action including the short-term and long-term consequences of each alternative. Next, the practitioner should choose an action which maximized the positive outcomes for all parties involved, implement the action and evaluate its results. Lastly the practitioner should reflect on the process and learn from it. As a consequence, the practitioner grows in knowledge and application of the decision-making model.

Application of Ethical Principles and Decision-Making Model
**Vignette**

The following vignette was adapted from the Counselling Ethics Casebook 2000 (2000) and was modified to fit the context of career practitioners.

An aboriginal child (Nancy) was referred to Bob Smith, a career development practitioner for consultation. Though he had never worked with Aboriginals before, Bob was confident in his ability to help Nancy work through her problems and help her find employment. He learned that Nancy had lived with her family on a reserve her entire life and had recently moved to this rural municipality to live with her grandmother. He also learned of the importance of culture in Nancy’s life. After 5 sessions, Bob was at a loss as to what to do. He was not making any progress with Nancy using techniques he had been successful with in the past. His success in the past had been with white, middle-class clients. He found it difficult to establish a relationship with Nancy due to his limited knowledge of her culture. He consulted with his associates, but they did not feel confident to counsel Nancy. They encourage him to remain in the relationship as he had a good success rate with his counselling in the past. Pushing his doubts aside, he did as the associates suggested.

This discussion below illustrates some of the main issues that arise from this vignette. The analysis is not intended to be exhaustive.

Phase 1 - Recognize that an ethical dilemma exists. In this example, the counsellor, Bob Smith, is faced with an issue of providing a service to a client in a rural setting where appropriate expertise may not be available. The counsellor becomes aware that counselling is not progressing as it should and the counsellor recognizes the dilemma.

Phase 2 - Identify issues for all parties. The counsellor recognized the limits to his competence and consults with his colleagues, who do not feel competent themselves to deal with Nancy. Nancy, an aboriginal wants to find employment and came to this counsellor for help in developing plans to get employment. Some of the guidelines from the Code which have a bearing on this situation include: 1.a. (Knowledge/Skills/Competency), 1.c. (Boundary of Competence), 1.g. (Respect for Persons) and 3.a. (Consultation).

Phase 3 - Risks and benefits. Nancy is expecting quality service and appears to keep coming for counselling. The main benefit for her is the possibility of the positive employment outcome. There are a number of potential risks for her. She may not be understood well and the counsellor may use interventions which are unsuitable to her ethnic worldview. The type of employment may not be suitable for her. Also she may expect certain outcomes which Bob the counsellor may not be able to deliver. For example, she may expect Bob to be directive in his approach to counselling where he may take a non-directive approach. He may not have assessed issues of ethnic identity and acculturation accurately. The main risk for Bob is that he may be practicing outside his boundary of competence and may engage in using discriminatory practices with his client. These risks involve the issue of malpractice for the counsellor.

Phase 4 - Choose an action. In this situation, the counsellor chose to continue working with the client. This may be an ethical route depending on what happens next. It is not possible for all counsellors to know everything about their client’s worldview. If counselling is viewed from a culture-centered perspective, then every client brings his or her culture to the counselling context and the counsellor must depend on the client to teach aspects of their culture which influence interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviour. If Bob did not choose this route, he could continue to try his best and not succeed. In practice he may be displaying a form of unintentional racism which discriminates against the client since the service requested is not that which gets provided.

**Conclusions**

The work of the Standards and Guidelines Initiative is monumental in that it scopes the domain of knowledge and skills considered necessary for the provision of competent service by career development practitioners. A component of the work developed by this initiative is the Code of Ethics. This code represents an amalgamation of current guidelines which, if used appropriately will help practitioners to provide a high level of quality and
consistent service. In addition, the code will help to educate practitioners about the principles valued by helping professionals and provides direction for practitioners to continue their life-long learning. Further the code provides a decision-making model to help practitioners conceptualize a framework for working through dilemmas of professional practice. Practitioners are well served by this code and should aspire to its principles and guidelines.
References


