



## **The role of ethical issues in evaluating HRD programs**

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### **Abstract**

There has been an increasing focus placed on the ethical responsibilities due by employers to employees over the past decade, and an increasing body of literature has addressed the benefits that accrue to organizations that build high performance that adhere to value-based ethical principles.

In this article, the author presents an overview of ethical issues of evaluation, or assessment, typically used in organizations. HRD professionals identified many Ethical Principles relating to HRD evaluation: Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity situation, deception in research, assess relevant components, voluntary participation of people, strive for honesty in all scientific communications, integrity regarding promises and agreements, aspects of research objectivity, carefully examine your research team work, non-discrimination against participants, know and obey relevant laws and institutional and governmental policies. All the organisational issues or problems, ethical issues are the most difficult ones to handle or deal with. Issues arise in employment, remuneration and benefits, industrial relations and health and safety.

This article also aims to integrate the factors in dealing ethical issues related with implementing quality performance management systems to achieve effective human resource management. The ways on how human resource development evaluation issues are heavily influenced by ethical consequences are determined and this paper intends to suggest practical issues in HRD evaluation to assist human resource managers to be more effective.

**Keywords:** ethical, employees, organizations, HRD evaluation

### **Introduction**

In traditional societies business activities were basically operations controlled by social norms, and were defined, similarly to other areas of life, by detailed rules, typically based on religious principles (for further information on the inter-relation between certain religious theories and business see Zsolnai, 2002).

Integration of business activities changed in the Modern Age due to effects of industrialisation process and Enlightenment philosophy, as its goal was to liberate/separate business activities (also) from the religion-dominated social-moral system. The process of 'differentiation of social sub-systems' has been started.

Ethics refers to right and wrong in conduct. Organizational ethics are rules and standards that guide workplace behavior and moral principles. These are guidelines for ethical behaviour and decision making in evaluation. They are intended firstly to promote the ethical practice of evaluation. For any evaluation there needs to be clarity about what will be considered a quality and ethical evaluation. Many organizations have guidelines which address issues of quality and ethics together. Conducting the evaluation ethically means that you are more likely to obtain open and honest feedback from participant.

An individual's participation in the evaluation must be voluntary and with informed consent. In order to be in a position to agree to be involved and to decide how open and honest to be with evaluators, participants need to be informed of:

1. The purpose of the evaluation

2. Who will be using the data collected
3. How they will be involved in the data collection process
4. How data collected will be used
5. How they will be informed of or be able to find out about the outcomes of the evaluation.
6. How their contribution will be recorded and stored what is meant by anonymity and confidentiality in the context of the evaluation, and the extent to which their anonymity and confidentiality will be respected.

HRD professionals identified many Ethical issues relating to HRD evaluation:

### **1. Informed consent**

Informed consent means that the employees participating in the evaluation is fully informed about the evaluation being conducted. The main purpose of informed consent is that the participant is able to make an informed decision as to whether they will participate in the evaluation or not. Participants need to be made aware of the purpose of the evaluation, how the findings will be used, if there are any potential adverse impacts of their participation and who will have access to the findings. Research team can ensure participants informed by providing an information letter which explains: Purpose of evaluation, Benefits, Methods and procedures, Risks, What has been done to ensure participant safety and minimize risk and harm?

### **2. Confidentiality**

The definition of confidentiality is the state of being secret or

of keeping secrets. Confidentiality means that any identifying information is not made available to, or accessed by anyone. Confidentiality also ensures such identifying information is excluded from any reports or published documents. These reports should also ensure that there is no opportunity for people to be identified even though names are not used. 'Confidentiality' relates to the protection of the data collected. Where the aim of your research is specifically to access private feelings and concerns, you will need to be clear about how the confidentiality of that data will be respected.

### **3. Anonymity**

Anonymity is the situation in which someone's name is not given or known. Anonymity is a stricter form of privacy than confidentiality, as the identity of the participant remains unknown to the research team. However, research team will often need to take more than this basic step to protect a participant's identity. Other information can help to identify people, for example: job title, age, gender, length of service, department, and strongly expressed opinions. The more pieces of information that are presented together, the easier it is to identify someone.

### **4. Deception in Research**

Deception occurs as the result of investigators providing false or incomplete information to participants for the purpose of misleading research subjects. Among the most difficult ethical decisions facing the behavioral researcher is not to use deception. Deception can range from relatively minor lapses/errors, such as not telling people the full story of what you are doing, to outright falsehood about your identity and the nature of the study. To deceive is to deliberately mislead others. The issue is most relevant in experimentation where personal knowledge of the purposes might change people's behavior. Researchers should avoid deception as much as possible.

### **5. Assess relevant components**

Only assess those components that are of relevance to the research being conducted and the group who are involved in the program. It is important to keep evaluations as simple as possible and to remain focused on the intention of the evaluation and what the data gathered will be used for.

### **6. Voluntary participation**

Voluntary participation means that people participate in the evaluation free from compulsion. An individual's participation in the evaluation must be voluntary. Participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time without negatively impacting on their involvement in future services or the current evaluation program and relationships with any of the researchers or research bodies involved. It is the right of participants to leave a program of this nature at any time; therefore no pressure should be placed on those who choose not to continue. Explanations are also not required.

### **7. Honesty**

Strive for honesty in all scientific communications. Honestly report data, results, methods and procedures, and publication status. Do not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Do not

deceive colleagues, research sponsors, participants or the public.

### **8. Integrity**

Keep your promises and agreements; act with sincerity; strive for consistency of thought and action.

### **9. Objectivity**

Strive to avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required. Avoid or minimize bias or self-deception. Disclose personal or financial interests that may affect research.

### **10. Carefulness**

Avoid careless errors and negligence; carefully and critically examine your research team work and the work of your peers. Keep good records of research activities, such as data collection, research design, and correspondence with agencies or journals.

### **11. Non-Discrimination**

Avoid discrimination against participants on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, or other factors not related to scientific competence and integrity.

### **12. Legality**

Know and obey relevant laws and institutional and governmental policies.

### **The ethics review process**

- 1. Ethics review committee (ERC):** An independent committee that has been formally designated to approve, monitor and review research or evaluation involving humans with the aim to protect their rights and welfare, e.g. an internal committee.
- 2. Ethics review board (ERB):** An independent board established exclusively to review research and determine if the rights and welfare of human participants involved in research are adequately protected.

### **Strengths and limitations**

Conducting the evaluation ethically means that you are more likely to obtain open and honest feedback from participants. However, it may also mean that you are unable to access or include in the findings all data that is relevant to the evaluation. This may well affect the outcome of the evaluation.

### **Practical Issues in HRD evaluation**

1. Permission will be needed to collect data – this may involve seeking permission to either be present in a class to undertake an observation, or to collect information from individuals through focus groups, interviews or questionnaires.
2. The requirements of the Data Protection Act must be observed when collecting, using and storing personal data.
3. Some participants may request that some comments be treated as confidential. As well as being ethical to respect

such requests, it also helps in building and maintaining the relationship of trust with them.

4. The accuracy of interview data collected must be checked by asking interviewees to comment on the data being used. This may involve them checking full transcripts if these are produced, or when these are not available then either summaries of conversations (including any quotes to be used) or draft copies of the reports in which the data has been used.
5. Where possible, it is also good practice to check that participants are happy with the accuracy and fairness of the representation of the data collected from them by circulating draft findings to them to give them an opportunity to respond to your interpretation. The time available and cost involved may not make this practicable for all participants.

### **Conclusion**

Human Resource Management is the systematic and effective management of people to achieve the desired objectives. To gain a strategic edge, it is very important to manage the 'people' resources productively. This will help to attain the strategic goals of the individual employee needs as well as to identify ethical issues relating to HRD evaluation. All the Human Resource practices are based on ethical foundation. It is the responsibility of the employers to maintain health and safety of their employees in the workplace. Finally, ethics play a vital role in HRD. The management should consider ethical issues relating to HRD evaluation of employees. Conducting the evaluation ethically means that you are more likely to obtain open and honest feedback from participants. It may also mean that you are unable to access or include in the findings all data that is relevant to the evaluation. This may well affect the outcome of the evaluation.

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