

Division 13: A Call for Broader Engagement and Action

11/20/2015

*Statement by the Society of Consulting Psychology, Executive Board
Endorsed by the Society for Industrial & Organization Psychology, Executive Board*

Division 13 Consulting Psychology – A Call for Broader Engagement and Action

Members of the Executive Board of Division 13 (Consulting Psychology) are seeking avenues to join with other Divisions and States to drive active support for the steps APA is taking to improve internal governance procedures and to regain the public's trust. As examples, we support enhanced identification and avoidance of harmful conflicts of interest, ensured open processes of review and broad consideration of input on important policies under development, and greater APA staff oversight by members of the Executive Management Group along with transparent communication with APA Governance. As a Division of psychologists engaged in general applied practice, organizational and health services consultation practice, applied scientific research and teaching, we advocate for perspectives and courses of action that we believe enable and support a very diverse field of psychology. Our priority is that APA offers a home for all psychologists and delivers the best that we have for the benefit of our clients and the betterment of society – we believe that this is critical for the sustainability of our profession.

The following represent recommendations for consideration, discussion and action.

Ethics Office Procedures Revision Process: While a considered review of the processes that the APA Office of Ethics and the APA Ethics Committee employ along with re-consideration of their adjudicative and educative focus should generate productive recommendations, the APA Ethics Committee and staff of the APA Ethics Office have worked hard and done much that is positive in recent years, e.g. conducted numerous preliminary and formal investigations, and developed and delivered numerous educational programs. These and the many other positive elements should be acknowledged and maintained. We recommend that once the Commission has developed its report and recommendations that these go through the full APA vetting process required for all new major positions of the organization so that all voices may be heard and all relevant input obtained. The decisions we make on this will affect the public and hundreds of psychologists for many years.

Probable Ethics Code Revision: It seems probable that there will be consideration given to revising the Ethics Code. It is now more than a decade old and needs to be a living document applicable to current day complexities. Standards 1.02, 1.03 3.04, and 3.05 among others such as telepractice will likely receive considerable attention. We support such a process if done carefully with representation from experts in applied and virtue ethics and the full range of areas of psychological practice, education, and science, so that we have to have a code that can appropriately balance the competing interests in the highly diverse range of what we do. It may be that a single code will work for all psychologists or that there will be a core set of aspirational and virtue principles that well service the entire field but a need for separate standards for individual mental health and health focused HSP practice versus GAP practice which often serves multiple clients, teams, organizations, communities, and society at large.

To elaborate, if APA is to remain the central organization for all psychologists, we need to focus on all the areas of practice including but not restricted to working with individuals in mental health or health practice settings and working with individuals and groups in organizational settings – to mention only two

examples of Health Service Providers and General Applied Psychologists. We are different from the AMA and APA in that way. We also need a Standard of Avoiding Harm that takes into consideration N>1 clients, e.g., group and family health services practice, and team, organization, community, societal, and global general applied practice. With multiple or collective clients, what is best for the 'larger client' may not be best or may even cause harm to a given individual or individuals. An example would be an organizational downsizing where some individuals lose their jobs but where the consultant may be helpful in mitigating the damage caused by a poorly designed or executed process. Another example may be a custody battle for children where only one parent is awarded custody when both are fighting for it. Many HSPs and GAPs provide services to N>1 client groups.

Development of a carefully considered policy for the roles of operational psychology: The approach to assemble a collaborative group of psychologists with appropriate expertise is critical for the development of ethically based practice for this specialized area. We feel that central to such an effort, however, is the active participation of those who are involved in operational psychology and others with relevant areas of expertise. No matter how well intentioned, excluding those with the most knowledge of this specialized field will inherently cause any policy done in their absence to have critical shortcomings and flaws. Additionally, the review process should involve utilization of the full system of input and vetting of proposed guidelines when they emerge by the various governance groups in APA and all the individual members. These well thought through and transparent feedback and vetting processes should be established a priori so that all feel the resulting policies will have been fully examined. In a very real sense, this would be engaging in the policy development process as it should have been done a decade ago as informed by all that has taken place since that time.

Considerations about Proposed State Legislation Prohibiting the Participation of Psychologists in the Torture and Abuse of Prisoners: We are fully supportive that no psychologists should participate in the torture and abuse of prisoners. However, poorly written and/or overly broad language once put into law may cause significant problems for clinical, forensic, organizational, operational and other psychologists involved in legal interrogations and related work along with the publics that they serve. Any proposed legislation should first be fully vetted by APA legal Counsel, representatives of divisions that are potentially impacted by it (42/41/29/13/14) and representatives of the areas of psychology designated above. Such proposed legislation should then go through the regular APA policies review process to insure that such policies, which then would gain legal standing, have the full support of the majority of the field of psychology and those who are served by it. Perhaps of greater importance, putting such ethical standards and guidelines for practice into law versus keeping them as ethical standards and guidelines places the enforcement of them into the legal system where psychology is no longer regulating itself and the control of the profession will have shifted from the profession to the legal system. Having clear ethical standards and guidelines would achieve the intended benefits of such legislation without involving the unanticipated adverse effects that might occur to psychologists engaged in legal practice not involving torture or abuse of prisoners.

Hiring of the interim CEO: The APA interim CEO search process has been designed for transparency. Specifically, there are clear mechanisms for input to the BOD from the members of COR for suggestions about possible candidates with the option to react to them. Recent events show a break from this process. We do not support the complete recusal from this interim CEO search decision process of Drs. Barry Anton, William Strickland, and Sandra Shullman. The latter two who serve as at-large members of the BOD were elected by us as COR representatives, while Dr. Anton serves on the Board as the current APA President elected by the general membership of APA. Moreover, these three psychologists, as duly elected BOD members, should actively participate in the subsequent hiring process of the next CEO of APA.

Perspectives on efforts to punish those named in the report: Related to the above item, in the absence of violation of state, federal, or international law, or of the APA Ethics Standards in effect at the

time, efforts to seek punishment or retribution against those mentioned in the Independent Report are unwarranted. For any for whom such evidence comes to light, it is important that appropriate due process be provided those so charged. Absent conviction of crimes or ethical violations as a result of such due process, these individuals must not be punished, their reputations besmirched, and their Divisions and APA members who elected them as their representatives denied their rights to same. Additionally, as a matter of basic legal/ethical rights, double jeopardy to retry cases where responsibility was not found should be rejected. Calling for prejudicial treatment of those named in the report without a due process finding of wrongdoing is itself an unprofessional, counterproductive, and potentially unethical action.

Next Steps

We hope that the above perspectives will serve as starting points for more detailed discussions and actions on each of the above areas. We believe these perspectives offer a centrist way of moving forward that attempts to find a balance among the many diverse voices of who we are as a discipline devoted to the public good and as a group of psychologists committed to social justice and service to our various clients.