Assessment of Attitudes and Ethics

from ‘Ethical Pursuits’
The Workplace Kit
(VEAC 1999)
About this booklet

This booklet is an extract from *Ethical Pursuits – The Workplace Kit* (VEAC 1999) which is designed to help organisations promote and develop their core organisational values. It provides information, strategies, resources and templates which can be used to assist with the process of translating these organisational values into everyday workplace behaviours.

The complete ‘Ethical Pursuits’ kit contains:

- Some questions answered
- Assessment guidelines and examples
- Scenarios – presenting ethical dilemmas and difficult situations
- Turning statements into action
- Future directions – towards a more effective workplace
- Disk with templates.

This booklet explains how ethics and attitudes can be included in assessment and gives examples of assessment methods and procedures covering ethics and attitudes.

It can assist you with:

- planning for assessments which include a focus on attitudes and ethics
- preparing candidates for assessment and conducting assessments
- managing and monitoring individual workplace performance, particularly the extent to which it reflects the core values of the organisation
- making judgements about competence eg. within the context of performance management or training
- reflecting on your approach to assessment of attitudes and ethics.
What are the difficulties?

Attitudes and ethics are assessed for a variety of reasons:

➤ to assess competency against competency standards
➤ in selection for employment
➤ in selection for promotion
➤ to assess training outcomes
➤ to monitor workplace performance
➤ for completion of a formal training program/ to gain a qualification
➤ for deployment to a sensitive task
➤ to gain a licence.

The research on which this booklet is based found that attitudes and ethics are very important but difficult to measure and manage. This is often because those "higher level competencies", which capture attitudes, ethics and values central to workplace performance, are often not included in explicit ways in competency standards, learning outcomes, performance objectives and other statements on which assessment is based. Examples of these may include workplace relations, valuing team/clients; respect for and valuing of different cultures, acceptance of alternative views, confidentiality, and so on.

In summary, workplace performance has tended to focus on the more easily observed and assessed “task oriented behaviours”, and supported the view that “the things that matter” are often very hard to express in behavioural terms. However, it is both possible and desirable to address attitudes and ethics within assessment. The following sections will provide some ideas on how this can be done.
Attitudes and ethics as behaviour

We assume that competent workplace performance includes not just “technical” competence but also that the person demonstrates “appropriate” attitudes and ethics. These attitudes and ethics are often built into formal workplace statements such as Codes of Ethics or Practice, Quality and Mission Statements and into formal training and performance objectives.

Attitudes and ethics cannot be observed as such, however as noted by Clayton (1995), it is possible to infer competence from an individual’s workplace behaviour and to make a judgement about whether they are performing satisfactorily.

In other words, what is appropriate and possible to assess is their directly observable behaviour, which reflects their attitudes and ethics and allows you to infer whether these are suitable in their particular job.

For example, where an organisation’s core value involves the need to be an effective team member, the expected behaviour in the workplace which would demonstrate the desired ethic or attitude could include that the person:

- is cooperative
- respects and considers what others say
- is not judgemental about others’ actions
- helps others when necessary
- supports colleagues
- contributes to solving problems
- abides by consensus decisions.

As noted by Clayton (1995), all of these can be directly observed, recorded, rated in terms of participation during team activities, scenario based discussions, and in real or simulated work situations. They can also form the basis for discussions of workplace performance in a more formative way as part of workbased coaching and mentoring. In this way they can contribute directly to development of the worker as well as being included in judgements about workplace performance.
Adopt an integrated approach

While we have noted that assessment of attitudes and ethics is generally agreed to be difficult, we have also recognised that it can be successfully achieved. One of the suggestions to help you to achieve it is by assessing attitudes and ethics in an integrated and holistic way.

Many of those concerned with the assessment of attitudes and ethics (Gonczi, A, 1993, Clayton, B. 1995 and Mossop, R 1997) promote the notion of assessing attitudes, values and ethics in an integrated way. This means the use of real, or integrated, contexts to measure specific competencies.

This involves assessing attitudes in combination with other skills being performed within a particular workbased context. For example, assessing a non racist approach in combination with customer service skills. To do this it is preferable to assess in a context which is as authentic as possible – that is, one which closely resembles the individual’s area of real work. This may mean that in many workplace and training situations it is often more appropriate to assess a complete workplace activity that covers a number of specific competencies. This may involve assessing a number of areas (or units) of competence within the assessment event, and, in the case of formal training programs, a number of learning outcomes from several modules.

Assessing attitudes and ethics

In deciding on an approach to assessment we need to think about what assessment tools can help us to make a judgement about whether a person is able to demonstrate acceptable workplace behaviour or not in relation to the stated assessment criteria. When selecting an assessment method to provide such evidence you need to think about...

- how relevant the method is in relation to the skills, knowledge, attitudes and ethics being assessed
- the purpose and the nature of the assessment
- what resources are available to the assessor and/or the individual being assessed
- what evidence already exists in the workplace
- how easy the assessment tools are to use
- whether the method is practical in terms of time and cost
- how well it can be used to collect evidence in an integrated and realistic way
- if you need to make allowable adjustments for the individual undergoing assessment on the basis of a permanent or temporary disability.

Source: VITAL, (1999) TAFE NSW

While there are a number of good approaches to assessing the attitudinal and ethical components of workplace competency, the two methods that were most strongly supported in the interviews used to develop this booklet were:

- Observation of workplace behaviour over time. This may occur as part of work based projects, observation of “real work activity”, simulations, and other practical activities.
- Discussion of situations that would elicit and clarify a person’s underlying attitudes and ethics, involving oral questioning or similar open ended responses (eg. written or oral responses to structured questions or “storytelling” responses). “Application of an assessment approach – A focus on the use of storytelling and structured questioning” contained in this resource is particularly helpful here.

Acceptable behaviour reflects certain core workplace attitudes and ethics valued by the organisation. In making such a judgement, an important assessor consideration is that of risk management. In other words, what are the critical components of the assessment and what is the risk associated with making a wrong assessment decision (for those such as the individual, the organisation, the Registered Training Organisation, etc). Clearly, areas such as safety, legislative or regulatory considerations and industry codes of practice can provide some guidance on this.
For example:

In Hospitality, a worker’s attitudes towards safety and hygiene within a restaurant kitchen are critical considerations in an integrated assessment of that person’s competence. The risk associated with not addressing safety and hygiene in assessment of that worker may be considerable eg. health risk to patrons, closure of kitchen, injury to self or another team member, or financial penalties imposed by regulatory bodies.

In summary, methods for assessment of attitudes and ethics need to be able to occur in combination with other skills, in realistic work-based settings and over time where possible. They also need to provide those being assessed with the opportunity to express their attitudes and ethics in relation to the acceptable workplace behaviour.

Methods such as written or oral responses to questioning, structured and open ended responses to case studies/ scenarios / ethical dilemmas linked to workplace tasks will be of use. In addition, assessments which require individuals to demonstrate behaviours which reflect the organisation’s core values can occur via simulations, projects or assignments in the workplace, and storytelling – structured questioning approaches.
Assessment over time

The research underpinning the development of this booklet strongly emphasised the importance of ensuring that assessments involving judgements of attitudes and ethics should occur over time, and preferably on a range of evidence across a number of different contexts. As rightly suggested by Berwyn Clayton (1995) and Rilda Mossop (1997) it is totally inappropriate to arrive at such an assessment decision on the basis of one assessment event.

Attitudes and ethics, which are seen as desirable in terms of accepted workplace behaviour, may take time to develop. Their development and assessment depends on factors such as:

- how explicitly these core values are expressed in training programs, competency standards, assessment criteria, and formal workplace statements (e.g., job descriptions, performance management documents, mission statements, industry codes of practice and industry quality/accreditation standards),
- how well these are then communicated and promoted within the organisation and/or industry, or training program,
- the gradual acquisition and understanding of the industry/organisation’s core values as the individual undergoes training and develops their skills, knowledge and understanding of their chosen vocational area.

The notion of **formative assessment** is particularly important here. This means that assessment is structured around providing **meaningful feedback** to the individual on the appropriateness of their behaviour and their progress towards competency. It also may provide **opportunities for the individual to clarify and discuss their own attitudes and ethics** in relation to the core values of their occupational area. Formative assessment has particular relevance to individual development plans within the context of a performance management system (particularly one which includes the concept of 360° feedback).

Formative assessment provides the opportunity to collect evidence **over time** that may assist in the **summative assessment** of the individual’s attitudes and ethics. Summative assessment is a more formal type of assessment that shows whether the individual has reached competency or achieved learning outcomes.
The range of evidence

A key issue in assessment involving attitudes and ethics is just what constitutes sufficient and appropriate evidence. This includes how to gather such evidence and how to make judgements about competence based on a range of evidence.
In order to make decisions about the sort of evidence you wish to gather you may need to think about.....

► what am I gathering evidence about? Types of evidence for an integrated assessment may include evidence about process, product, knowledge, skills, attitudes, ethics and analysis and problem solving.
► how am I going to gather the evidence? For example, by observation, portfolio, via questioning or responses to triggers such as ethical dilemmas, scenarios, videos, by written responses or a presentation.
► how much is enough? What is sufficient evidence? Consider the balance of direct and indirect evidence.

When making judgements about evidence you need to think about....

► is it valid, that is, relevant to the standards you are assessing against (and the acceptable behaviours you have determined reflect the desired core values)?
► is it consistent with evidence from other assessment events or the usual performance / workplace behaviours of the individual being assessed?
► is it sufficient for you to make a judgement of competence?
► is it current? The term “currency” in this context is referring to whether you consider the evidence to be current enough to be of worthwhile consideration in making your judgement about competence.
► is it authentic?

Adapted from: VITAL, (1999) TAFE NSW

One the most difficult part of assessment including a focus on attitudes and ethics is to allay concerns about perceived subjectivity in arriving at an assessment decision. For this reason, it is crucial that everyone involved in the assessment is clear about just what is being assessed, for what purpose and, most importantly, against what criteria.

The above considerations can provide a focus for ensuring that the final assessment decision is seen to be transparent, acceptable and fair.
Some case studies

Example 1
In reception at a large hotel it is important to demonstrate non-racist attitudes. One way of assessing these attitudes in this context is to look at them and customer service skills together and determine that, in this role, non-racist behaviour means that:

- customers are greeted politely and respectfully
- they are served in order of arrival
- if they are not fluent in English, they are treated with patience and every effort is made to meet their needs.

Possible assessment methods include observation (of actual work/ during simulations or role plays/ of practical exercises, case study responses (via written or oral structured questioning).

Example 2
As a pharmacy assistant, it is essential to maintain confidentiality. The requirement to maintain confidentiality can be assessed in combination with procedures for filling prescriptions and customer service. In this role maintaining confidentiality means that:

- customer prescriptions are handed directly to pharmacist and not left lying around on the counter
- customer details and other written information relating to their health are not left lying around for others to read
- access to customer information is not given to unauthorised people
- customer information is not discussed with colleagues or friends
- request for sensitive advice is given discretely and referred to the pharmacist as appropriate.

Possible assessment methods include observation (of actual work/ during simulations or role plays/ of practical exercises, case study responses (via written or oral structured questioning), through the use of complex storytelling and questioning, using scenarios and ethical dilemmas as the basis for open-ended responses.

Example 3
In a pharmaceutical manufacturing environment, it is important that employee’s hold appropriate attitudes in relation to compliance with mandatory regulations and respect for the team environment. Valuing the team and commitment to adhere to regulations can be assessed in combination with the technical skills of operating the equipment. In this role appropriate behaviour in relation to team and regulations means that:

- team colleagues are listened to and their views acknowledged
- working effectively within the team or work group to resolve problems quickly and effectively
- communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and at different levels in the organisation
any "non-conformities" are discussed and reported by the team promptly and in keeping with the documented procedures.

Possible assessment methods include observation (of actual work/ during simulations or role plays/ of practical exercises, case study responses (via written or oral structured questioning), workbased project or assignments, involving self reflection, via learning contracts where the individual must negotiate what aspects of their work performance they will report on and the process of how and why they went about a specific workbased task in a particular way is able to be captured.
Assessment method: storytelling

The following is a process for determining competency through the use of **storytelling and structured questioning**. The richness of the evidence generated allows the assessor to gather data on the candidate's attitudes and ethics within the context of their practice. It is a valuable assessment method for both formative and summative assessment.

Discussion- complex story telling

- The use of complex story telling is based on the idea that candidates can be led, through questioning, to explore a complexity of issues from a single well-selected episode of practice.
- The method is based on the notion that a complex story of practice can be used to assess a number of competencies simultaneously. This is a multifaceted approach to assessment rather than the more typical ‘linear’ approach, which deals with each unit of competency separately.
- The case study chosen also demonstrates the interpretation of issues of attitudes, values and ethics. In the case of childcare, these are underpinning aspects of the units of competency.

A quick note about potential assessment “pitfalls” to be aware of:

There are potential ‘flaws’ in the application of attitudes, values and ethics to the assessment of competency. There are a number of potential places in which these flaws can occur. These are:

1. In the development of the competency standards themselves. If the underlying attitudes, values or ethics are not articulated and clarified in the standards, then they cannot be an integral component of the assessment and cannot be reflected in the assessment outcome.

2. The interpretation of the units of competency by the assessor is another place where attitudes, values and ethics can be ‘flawed’.

3. The process of assessment is another place where attitudes, values and ethics can cause problems.

These potential “flaws” in the assessment of attitudes and ethics are detailed very briefly here. They are certainly areas worthy of further exploration.

---

1 Developed for VEAC by Sally Davis & Judi Aptee

© 2002 Vocational Education & Assessment Centre
Stages of questioning.

There are various stages of questioning within the complex story telling approach. The approach is based on the theory of “narrative storytelling”. Each stage has a different purpose and so the style of questions will vary. It should be noted that it is not a linear model - eg. various stages may be revisited throughout the assessment process.

The stages are as follows:

**Questions of invitation** invite the candidate to explore and select different scenarios or stories, which reflect his/her work practice. The best questions are those which elicit experiences which 'stretched' the applicant, and which are fresh and spontaneous, enabling 'unrehearsed responses.

**Questions of exploration.** These questions enable a simple story to be developed into a more complex story by seeking information on other perspectives (eg other stakeholder’s reactions). The questions can also analyse the situation in terms of contextual factors and work practice choices (eg other options which the candidate might have considered or tried).

**Questions of confirmation.** These questions ask the candidate to name the competencies achieved through the experience outlined in the complex story.

**Questions of investigation.** These questions follow up any areas of uncertainty or ambiguity. They also check that the assessment is occurring at the appropriate AQF level. They are the questions that fine-tune the assessment and the assessment decision.

All of these questions generate evidence. They aim to develop quality evidence which is rich and broad. The assessor makes the assessment decision based on the evidence which is generated.

These questions are demonstrated in the following example of an assessment of a complex story in family day care services. The underlying attitudes, values and ethics are embedded in the story and linked to the units of competency.
Storytelling – an example

The following is a simple example of the process. Obviously in a real assessment the assessor would need to use a range of questions at each stage, there would be lengthier and more detailed discussion, and the actual story would be longer and more complex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessors questions</th>
<th>Candidates response – a complex story</th>
<th>How to use this... relationship to the units of competency. Discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Question of invitation. ‘Can you tell me a challenging time you had to communicate with the children in your care and which brought out the best in you?’ | Well I had 3 children in care in my home. Jenny was 3 years old and had been with me for 6 months. Max was 2 years old and had also been with me for 6 months. Sam was 2 ½ and had been with me for 3 months. I noticed that Max was upset and when I went to investigate I saw that he had a bite on his arm. I comforted him, bathed his arm and tried to work out what had happened. | This relates to unit  
• communicate with children  
The candidate is beginning to describe an incident which relates to this unit but which, if expanded will likely relate to other units of competency.                                                                                                               |
| Questions of exploration. So how did you work out what had happened?              | Well I decided to keep an eye on the children, to observe them more intensively. I noticed that Max was aggressively taking Sam’s toys. Jenny told him off but he just did it again. It was after this second time that Sam bit Max again. So I immediately stopped Sam and told him that we didn’t bite each other. I took Max aside and comforted him, and also found some other toys for him to play with. I decided to think about how each of the children had been behaving over the past week, and I knew that I had to talk to the parents. | This now relates to  
• communicate with children  
• interact positively with children  
• guide children’s behaviour                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessors questions</th>
<th>Candidates response – a complex story</th>
<th>How to use this… relationship to the units of competency. Discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Question of exploration**  
What were the results of your talking with the parents? How did they respond? | I knew I had to talk to both Sam’s and Max’s parents. I had to explain that Sam had bitten Max and that I had bathed and comforted him. Both parents were distressed when I told them what had occurred. I also talked to the parents about my own plans – which was to continue to closely observe the children over the next week. I asked the parents about what was happening at home. I learnt that Sam’s younger brother was in hospital, and that his mother had been constantly visiting and had been quite upset and concerned about him. The younger brother was due out of hospital in a few days. I considered this to be a short term problem. | This relates to  
• communicate with family members about their children  
• observe children |
| **Question of confirmation**  
Can we now review the units of competency and see how your story relates to them | I had been thinking about the unit on communicating with family members when I started describing this incident. I didn’t realise that I was also describing how I met the other units of competency | All of the units above. |
| **Question of investigation**  
I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about what happened when you talked to the children’s parents. You said they were distressed. How did you react to that? | Yes, they were quite upset. It is always difficult for parents to hear that their child has been bitten, or has bitten another child. I guess the important thing was that I remained calm and listened to their concerns before I followed up with requests for more information and their own observations of their child’s behaviour over the past week. | This question follows up and gets more information for the unit  
• communicate with family members  
• this response is appropriate for AQF level 3 |

Note: For more details of the competency standards on which this assessment example is based refer to pages 108, 109, 155 and 156 from the Children’s Services National Competency Standards – Community Services Training Package (ie. CHCICAA Communicate with children; and CHCRF1A – Communicate with family members about their child.)
### Storytelling - template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessors questions</th>
<th>Candidates response – a complex story</th>
<th>How to use this... relationship to the units of competency. Discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question of confirmation.</strong> Eg. ‘Can you tell me a challenging time you had (…….) and which brought out the best in you?’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question of investigation</strong> Eg. So how did you work out what had happened?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question of exploration</strong> (consider further questions to ask)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question of confirmation</strong> Eg. Can we now review the (units of competency) and see how your story relates to them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question of investigation</strong> Eg. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about what happened when ..... How did you react to that?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For more details of the competency standards on which this assessment is based refer to the relevant Training Package or see your HR/Training and Development/Educational Manager.
Have you….

☐ ensured the purpose of the assessment is clear – to you and to those being assessed.

☐ ensured the assessment criteria is explicit and in explained in terms both you and the candidate clearly understand.

☐ selected an integrated assessment approach which combines assessment of attitudes with other skills used in a particular workplace situation.

☐ considered issues such as relevance, assessment purpose and context, resources, evidence requirements, critical elements and risk, ease of use, authenticity when deciding on your assessment approach.

☐ gathered evidence based on observation of behaviour over time, rather than based on a particular event, and from a range of sources.

☐ considered the impact of issues such as culture, gender, disability on a person’s ability to demonstrate and articulate their attitudes and ethics in response to a given situation or context.

☐ considered potential “flaws” which could occur that may impact on the assessment (eg. refer back to the three listed at the bottom of p.9).

☐ involved a number of people in the assessment process – supervisor/ team leader, manager, team and so on.

☐ provided opportunities for those being assessed to reflect on their behaviour and receive feedback on behaviour in relation to the core values included in the assessment.

☐ used the results of assessment for constructive feedback and possibly as the basis for a personal development plan.

☐ You may want to add to this list yourself…..
Assessment guidelines – your notes

This is designed to get you started in reflecting on your own situation and likely issues / difficulties you may need to address as well as how you can use the assessment process as an opportunity to explore attitudes and ethics more fully …..

Possible issues

➤ How can we best assess attitudes and ethics when they are not directly observable?

➤ What do I do if I encounter an ‘appalling’ attitude or ethic while assessing?

➤ How can I determine the critical aspects of competent performance?

➤ How can I manage the risk associated with making a judgment which includes reference to attitudes and ethics? (eg. what are the consequences of failure – what risks exist for the individual, the organisation, the client of an incorrect assessment decision?)

➤ What ethical concerns could arise from specifying attitudinal requirements in assessments?

This section has been left blank for you to add your own ideas, comments, references, experiences, etc....
Useful references


