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Being Ethical in Instructional Technology Consulting

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Abstract: *As new technologies merge everyday and become part of our lives, instructional technology consulting that provides professional services to help clients use technologies for learning and performance improvement becomes more popular and important. Being ethical in consulting has been recognized as a crucial and important part of consulting services by many professional organizations, consulting firms, consulting professionals, and their clients. Corresponding to the theme of AECT Convention 2008, professional ethics, the paper examines the meaning of being ethical in instructional technology consulting from the lived experiences of instructional technology consultants and discusses implications for promoting the ethical practice of instructional technology consulting.*

Keywords: instructional technology consulting, ethics, ethical practice of instructional technology

1. Introduction

Scholars and practitioners believe that technology advancement together with fast-growing international ventures, increasing business outsourcing, and expanding distance education has dramatically changed the training and learning landscapes (Rosenburg, 2001; Welsh et al., 2003). These changes also create unprecedented opportunities as well as challenges for instructional technology consultants who provide consulting services to individuals and groups. As instructional technology consulting becomes more popular and important in the fields of education and work places, ethical issues have received more attention than ever before in professional organizations like Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). AECT Professional Ethics Committee has done a tremendous job to increase awareness of professional ethics among AECT members (Yeaman et al., 2008). Scholars (Lin, 2007; Yeaman, 2004a, 2004b) have called for research in professional ethics to better understand the meaning.

This study examines the significance of being ethical in instructional technology consulting and seeks implications for promoting the ethical practice of instructional technology consulting. The study took place in an Instructional Technology Special Topic Course offered at a state university in the southeast. The instructional goal of the course was to prepare students to become competent and ethical instructional technology consultants. The final course project required students to individually interview and analyze the lived experiences of the selected instructional technology consultants. This paper reports the study results based on seven interviews that discussed the meaning of being ethical in instructional technology consulting. The interviews were conducted by an assistant professor, a graduate student, and three doctoral students of instructional technology.

2. Literature Review

Consulting is a unique social and human phenomenon that is widely practiced. Though people maintain different definitions of consulting, as a professional practice, consulting is often defined as the application of talents, expertise, experiences, and other attributes to help the client solve problems and improve the client's condition (Bellman, 2002; Block, 2000, 2001; Cope, 2003; Holtz, 2000; Schein, 2002; Weiss, 2004) . Instructional technology consulting aims at solving the client's learning and performance problems through the application of the consultant's expertise and experiences in instructional technology. Consulting is an outcome-oriented, dynamic, and interactive process. Biech states that consulting is "the process by which an individual or a firm assists a client to achieve a stated outcome" (1999, p. 2).

As a consultant is in a position to have some influence over an individual, a group, or an organization in a course of action (Block, 2000), consulting requires not only technical and relationship competence to get the job done (Robinson & Robinson, 1999), but also a strong sense of being professional and ethical from consultants. Given the fact that more people are employing technologies for both educational and training purposes and "anything has potential for being assessed along the ethical dimensions" (Yeaman et al. 2008, p. 248), ethics issues in instructional technology consulting, which can have direct impact on what people learn and how people learn with the technology, should not be ignored.

Ethics issues in consulting have been a focus of discussions among many professional organizations. Professional organizations like Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT, 2007), International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI,

2008), and American Society for Training & Development (ASTD, 2007) have published and enforced their own code of ethics. The overall purpose in emphasizing these professional code of ethics is to educate their members, "to heighten the awareness of importance of ethical behaviors" (Lin, 2007, p. 413), and support them "for engagement with the imprecise difficulties of professional life" (Yeaman et al., 2008, p.229). The newly published definition of educational technology emphasizes "ethical practice" of educational technology because "there has been an increase concerns and attention to the ethical issues within educational technology"(Januszewski & Molenda, 2008, p. 3).

In previous studies of instructional technology consulting, Wang (2007) and his colleagues (Wang, et al. 2008 March; Wang, et al. 2007, March) explored the essence of instructional technology consulting. The studies revealed that instructional technology consulting, as a multifaceted and multi-leveled complex phenomenon, had five different levels. These levels were (1) objective level, (2) task level, (3) strategic level, (4) cultural level, and (5) philosophic level. At the cultural level, instructional technology consulting is building a trusting relationship, understanding the real needs of the clients, and dealing with ethics issues in the consulting practice. This reflects "the social and professional essence of instructional technology consulting as working with and working for people" (Wang, 2007, p. 60). Instructional technology consulting, as a complex phenomenon, is defined as "to solve problems and create advancement opportunities for the clients, meet expectations, apply creative and practical strategies, work with a team, build trusting relationships with clients, deal with ethics issues, and it is a fun, intrinsically rewarding, and a manifestation of a love for learning" (Wang, 2007, p. 64). In these studies, dealing with ethics issues is a key

element revealed as the essence of instruction technology consulting.

In a recent article that reported a study of ethics of instructional technology, Lin (2007) identified six ethical issues that professional technologists experienced and five strategies they used to cope with those ethical issues. These ethical issues included (1) copyright, (2) learner privacy, (3) accessibility, (4) diversity, (5) conflicts of interest, and (6) professionalism/ confidence. The five strategies were (1) team communication, (2) law and policies, (3) management consultation, (4) professional integrity, and (5) technical solutions. Lin (2007) stated; after an extensive literature review that "the lack of empirical studies in the area of ethics and instructional technology has obviously become a concern (Mabry & O'Driscoll, 2003; Schwier, 2005; Visscher-Voerman & Gustafson, 2004)"(Lin, 2007, p. 412). In the article, Lin cited the works of other scholars to describe the current status of ethics research, stating that empirical research that examines ethics and ethical dilemmas encountered in actual practice are "the least researched perspective" (Mabry & O'Driscoll, 2003, p. 82) and "may be a rather neglected topic for research" (Yeaman, 2004b, p. 16). Toward the end of the article, Lin pointed out: " Currently, how professional technologists deal with ethical issues in their work activities is still underspecified in the literature" (Lin, 2007, p. 433). Finally, Lin suggested that future research is needed "to identify the ethical issues and coping strategies" (Lin, 2007, p. 433).

In a discussion of emergent ethical actions and the culture of engineering, Hauser-Kastenberg, Kastenberg, and Norris (2003) believe that a significant cultural change has taken place in engineering from "applying ethics" to "being ethical." This is true to the field of instructional technology as revealed by the literature related to ethical issues and by various

persistent efforts of professional organizations, such as AECT, to increase awareness of ethical behaviors of their members. However, among the proliferation of the literature, research that explores the meaning of being ethical from the lived experiences of instructional technology consultants is rare and hard to find.

3. Research Questions and Methodology

This study took a general qualitative approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) and used a phenomenological method (Creswell, 1998) to interview experienced instructional technology consultants. Phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), explores the nature of "lived experience." Phenomenology, in research, questions the way subjects experience the world. Therefore, phenomenological research is situated in the "life-world" in order to gain insights into how individuals reflect on and understand their experiences (van Manen, 1990). The questions in phenomenology ask for the meaning and significance of a phenomenon from the people who experienced it in order to reveal its essence. This study was designed to find answers to two major research questions.

1. What is the lived experience of being ethical in consulting described by instructional technology consultants?
2. What implications can be drawn from study findings to promote ethical practice of instructional technology consulting?

3.1. Study Participants

Study participants refer to those who participated in the research interviews. In this study, seven participants were selected and interviewed. The criteria for selecting consultants included at least ten years of consulting experiences in the field of instructional technology, a graduate degree in instructional technology or instructional

technology related program of study, and a personal Web site that demonstrates substantial experiences in the field. The participants' consulting experiences are diverse in the fields of technology integration, e-learning, performance improvement, knowledge management and electronic performance support system (EPSS), online community of practice, team collaboration and performance, adult learning, strategic planning with a focus on learning with technology, and training program design and evaluation in different consulting arenas as displayed in Table 1.

3.2. Interviews

The interviews with study participants varied from 42 minutes to 80 minutes in length. All the interviews were face-to-face with audio-recording in one or two different media (audio-tape recording and/or MP3). The interviews were semi-structured with questions designed to uncover the perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences of instructional technology consultants (see in appendix). Semi-structured interviews allowed more interaction between the researchers and study participants, and allowed the researchers to probe beyond

Table 1: Summary of study participants.

Participants	Job Title	Degree & Major	Consulting Arena
1	• Retired Professor of Instructional Technology • Instructional technology consultant with his own consulting firm	Ph. D. in Instructional Technology	Corporations and Higher Education
2	• Associate Professor of Instructional Technology • Department Chair	Ed. D. in Instructional Technology	Corporations and Higher Education
3	• Senior Research Scientist	Ph. D. in Instructional Technology	K-12, and Higher Education
4	• Professor of instructional technology	Ph.D. in Instructional Technology	Corporations, Higher Education, and Military
5	• Associate Professor of Educational Technology	Ph.D. Instructional Systems Design	Corporations, and Higher Education
6	• Learning Manager • Instructional technology consultant	Ph.D. in Instructional Systems	Corporations
7	• Independent instructional technology consultant	M.S. in Counseling Psychology	Corporations and industries

specific questions (Hauser-Kastenberg et al., 2003). During the interviews, prompting questions were asked to facilitate reflection of the instructional technology consultants' lived experiences of being ethical.

3.3. Data Analysis

In phenomenological research, data analysis involves a constant movement between understanding and the explanation of detailed microscopic data and macroscopic theory (Nicholls, 2003). A goal of phenomenological research is to reveal the essence of the phenomenon by integrating the lived experience of the researched, the researcher, and the reader of the research into a whole (van Manen, 1990). The interview data used for analysis in this study were recorded between summer 2006 and spring 2008 and the procedure of data analysis included (a) organizing and cleaning data, (b) generating data categories and themes, and (c) validating and reporting the findings.

In organizing and cleaning data, the interviews were transcribed into text with the some sensitive information concealed to protect the confidentiality of the study participants and their clients. The interview transcripts were sent to the study participants to review for accuracy and confidentiality prior to the data analysis. Four study participants made minor revisions to the interview transcripts.

In reading and generating categories and themes, each interview transcript was read and then categorized with a focus on being ethical in instructional technology consulting. Then, the categorized data were repeatedly read and further categorized according to the emerging themes. The progressive immersion into the data enabled the researcher to identify clusters of themes and discover the inherent meaning in the description of the phenomenon under investigation. Using these clustered themes, the researcher revealed the fundamental structure (nature or essence) of the phenomenon (Nicholls, 2003) - being ethical in instructional technology consulting.

As a means to triangulate the data, the analysis results and the report were sent to the study participants to review and comment upon. Four study participants reviewed and commented on both the data analysis results and the report. Revisions were made according to their comments to ensure accuracy of data analysis and to validate the research findings.

4. Research Findings

All the study participants believed that being ethical was a key to success for any consulting practice and the ethics issues they encountered as a consultant were different and diverse. Their efforts in dealing with those ethical issues reflected their professional standards, personal values and integrity. Then, what is the very essence of being ethical in instructional technology consulting? Essence, according to van Manen (1990), is the very nature of a phenomenon and the internal meaning structures of the lived experience. The analysis results indicate that being ethical in instructional technology consulting is (1) being professional, (2) going above and beyond expectations, (3) maintaining personal integrity, and (4) being willing to learn in consulting practices.

4.1. Being Professional

Being ethical is being professional in instructional technology consulting. All the study participants mentioned in one way or another that being ethical is being professional. "Being professional" is rich in meaning and demonstrates through all kinds of consulting behaviors such as (a) meeting expectations of

clients, (b) being honest, (c) putting clients' interests in first place, and (d) reflecting on personal consulting practice.

4.1.1. Meeting expectations of clients. Meeting expectations is an internal driving force behind all the consulting efforts. The bottom line for measuring success of consulting is to see if the consultant can deliver what is promised to meet the client's expectations. Meeting expectations is one of the most important criteria that clients use to evaluate consultant's professional ethics. Meeting expectations strongly impacts decision making in consulting as described by some study participants.

> You meet expectations, meet or exceed expectations, so you have to find out and clarify, in this case with the client, what are their expectations and then you just need to make sure you meet or exceed them… so we were always able to deliver at least meeting expectations and many times more than meeting expectations (Participant 1).

> I knew that it would be a total disaster if I could not deliver the report the next day and it's absolutely not ethical to call them (the client) at this point and say: "I am sorry…" It's just not professional and it is not ethical (Participant 7).

The participants emphasized that meeting expectations in instructional technology consulting is not just limited to quality of the final deliveries, but also quality of the whole consulting process including how a consultant works with the clients. This leads to the next theme of being professional--being honest.

4.1.2. Being honest. The study participants believed that consulting, which is always working for and working with people, really begins with a trusting relationship. Consulting

begins with building trust and then maintaining and nurturing that trust by being honest with clients. Many of the study participants are "brutally honest" in consulting.

> Trust is through the work that you do, and actually doing something, or building something for them, and they go, yes, that works. It's through your actions.... I've probably lost work because I've been too brutally honest upfront. … But I have had clients come back to me and say, you know, hey, you were right. (Participant 6)

> I told them (the clients) it was not what they really needed. It's a system problem, not their drivers'. I had a really good talk with them (the clients) explaining what I saw, what I heard, showed them my data, and so on, and … I got to be honest with them. It pays off. Eventually I got a contract, not the driver training one. (Participant 3).

Being honest in consulting helps consultants win trust from their clients. Being honest also includes being "objective and impartial." Telling a lie, exaggerating the situation, and concealing information from a client under any circumstance is not professional or ethical.

4.1.3. Putting clients' interests in first place. Being professional means putting clients' interest in first place in consulting practice. Consulting as a profession makes profit by solving clients' problems. Though financial interests exist in most cases of the study participants, it is evident in the interview stories and reflections that they always put clients' interests in first place.

> Like this one project I'm working on here, and I have to be very careful how I frame this because I don't want to reveal

any client confidentiality here, but in this case, an RFP was issued, the statement of work was done, the proposal was accepted and I was called in. But what they have put forward is not the solution that is necessary for the client. And I have ethical guidelines, and one is that if I cannot justify the value that I give to the client, then I will not do the work for the client. (Participant 7)

I focused on their success so that I can do to help them be successful as my clients… It' not about what I can do for them, how much money I can get out of it, it's all about what they need to do that I can help (Participant 4)

Consulting as a complex social phenomenon involves many parties (e.g. the clients, stake holders, consultants, colleagues and teammates) with different interests. When there is a conflict of interest in consulting, putting clients' interests first can be a real challenge for many consultants and the decisions made will demonstrate the consultants' professionalism.

4.1.4. Reflecting on personal consulting practice.
Being professional means frequently and deeply reflecting on one's personal consulting practice. Problems that an instructional technology consultant is called to solve are usually so complicated and serious that they could impact many people in an organization. Reflecting on personal behaviors and decisions made illustrates another quality of being professional in the consulting practice.

So, they wanted me to create a faulty comparison, and everybody in the room was pushing me to do that. Everybody! You don't know how difficult the situation is until you are in it, because everything inside me said "there's no way I can do that. There's no way,

because that's just not sound research and if I do that I probably wouldn't be able to practice evaluation again because everybody's going to point to that piece of research and say that's really shoddy work." Nobody should be doing that. That's malpractice. It really, truly, honestly is malpractice (Participant 3).

"Should I feel comfortable if it is reported in a local TV channel or a local newspaper? Can I tell my colleagues about my decision? Can I face my wife and my daughter when I get home?" These questions did come up at that time. Oh, man, it was really tough, really tough (Participant 6).

Reflecting on consulting practice ensures quality of consulting services and keeps consultants on the moral track, especially when facing an ethical dilemma that requires emotional responses to resolve the issue. The study participants reported that they reflected on their behaviors and decisions against professional and personal values.

4.2. Going above and beyond Expectations

Being ethical is going above and beyond expectations of the clients in instructional technology consulting. Being a professional in consulting requires that a consultant meets the client's expectation. The study participants say that meeting clients' expectations is "a must" while going above and beyond expectations is "a right thing to do" even at their own costs in a consulting practice.

And I suspected that they weren't going to just take my word and results I collected as evidence that the CBT (compute-based training) was not well designed. So, I actually spent, I

remember at the time (20 years ago), I spent 1,500 dollars of my own consulting money to hire three, at that time, very well known experts in CBT, to review the software. And they [the experts] came back with just devastating reviews of this particular software, but also, you know, lots of real good critical advice of how they might be able to improve it, and so forth. (Participant 4).

Going above and beyond expectations reflects consultants' pride and personal values. The pride they take in their consulting practice together with consultants' personal values drives them to go extra miles to help their clients. Being ethical, as a consulting behavior, is well-portrayed in the consultants' efforts to go above and beyond expectations in their consulting.

4.3. Maintaining Personal Integrity

Being ethical is maintaining personal integrity in consulting. Consulting is a professional practice and maintaining personal integrity is deeply embedded in all the small but critical decisions made during the consulting practice. It could be as simple as "being honest," and "not promising what you can't deliver and not delivering what they don't need." Maintaining personal integrity is the professional life line. This is very true when instructional technology consultants face the situation where they have to make hard choices.

Sometimes you get hired by clients who want an evaluation, but they want the evaluation to be good, regardless of what the real situation is…. And the client kept writing to me and saying, "Well, if you do a really good job on this evaluation, we're going to have a lot more work for you." But, the implied message was if the results don't come back good, we will never have any more work for you… I could not accept that. (Participant 4).

Inside, I was just spinning because I thought I'm either going to lose my job here today, because they want me to compromise my ethics, or I'm going to lose my job down the road because I'm going to do really awful work… I guess that what I'm most proud of is that I stuck to my guts and I didn't compromise my ethics. (Participant 3).

I try to maintain my integrity, and my customer's integrity, uh. ... He said, you are working for me, creative, you know we need to get the most out of this as possible, he really wanted me to beat up the partner and make the partner feel badly about themselves, so that we would make a better deal, so I said I would not do that, so we would get into shouting matches with each other and I'd walk off of the job (Participant 7).

Maintaining one's personal integrity is not as easy as "not telling the lie." It can be very frustrating and sometimes it "takes guts" to uphold a high standard of personal conduct in consulting practice.

4.4. Being Willing to Learn

Being ethical is being willing to learn. Instructional technology consultants solve different learning and performance problems by working with different people and for different individuals and organizations. This nature of instructional technology consulting determines that consultants must be willing to learn in order to provide their clients with satisfying professional services.

It's interesting and challenging too! I always wanted to see how a pilot was trained in a simulated program. But at that time, I had no experience in a simulated training program. I decided to spend a whole week digging into it. … That's what I did: be willing to learn and be ready to meet challenges (Participant 5).

I knew there was something going on. I couldn't figure it out. I sensed that it must be something relating to, or specific to this team. Of course, it was not specified in my contract. I could just ignore the problem and saying, "here is it" and the end of the story. But I just could not let it go like this. I decided to probe into it and learn more about their background, history, values and norms and so on and so forth. I believe I should, as a consultant, be willing to learn (Participant 6).

Being willing to learn is not limited to learning to solve technical problems. Most importantly, it means to be willing to learn about the people that a consultant is working with and working for. This includes being willing to learn about the value, culture, and how things are done in the organizations that might be different from those held by a consultant and respect those differences.

4.5. Summary

Being ethical to many people can be a measure or judgment of a consultant's behavior against a professional code of ethics. But, to a consultant, being ethical itself is an essential consulting behavior with real and solid consequences. This study reveals that being ethical in instructional technology consulting has rich meaning that includes being professional, going above and beyond expectations, maintaining personal integrity, and being willing to learn in consulting practices as illustrated in Figure 1 which describes the essence of being ethical in instructional technology consulting.

Two limitations of this study should be mentioned here. First, this study included participants from the southeast of the United States. Although the themes that emerged from the data analysis are strong and obvious, study participants from different areas and consulting in different arenas in instructional
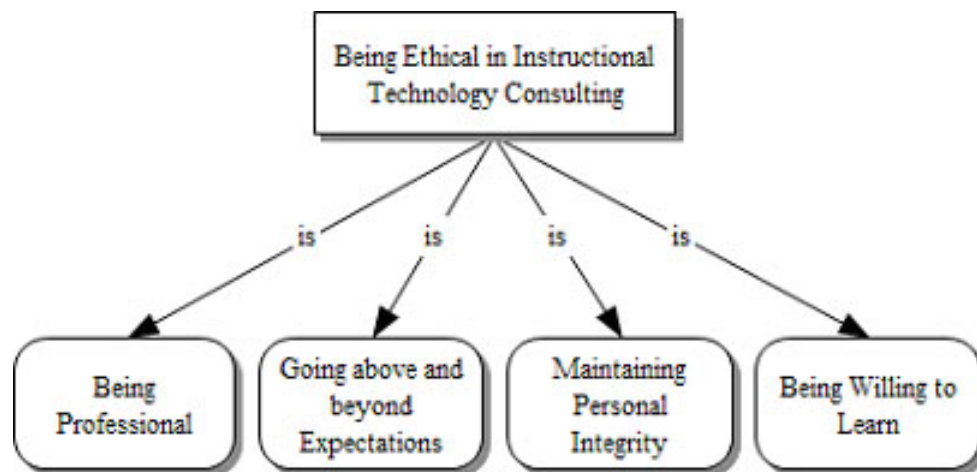
Figure 1. Being Ethical in Instructional Technology Consulting

technology are needed in order to confirm the study findings. Second, the interviews were conducted by different researchers who were not equally experienced in conducting interviews. Therefore, the study participants were not likely to have been equally prompted to tell and reflect upon their lived experiences of instructional technology consulting in these interviews.

5. Discussions

Exploring the meaning of being ethical in instructional technology consulting is to apply what is learned and to promote being ethical in instructional technology consulting. Based on the research findings above, the discussions here focus on implications for promoting ethical practice of instructional technology consulting at the organizational, community, and individual levels.

5.1. At the Organizational Level

The study reveals that being ethical is an essential consulting behavior with real and solid consequences. This is supported by other scholars and researchers. Literature on ethics (AECT, 2007; Januszewski & Molenda, 2008; Lin, 2007; Maister, 2005; Wang, 2007; Yeaman, 2004b; Yeaman et al., 2008) in one way or another indicates that being ethical is about what a professional *does*. For example, in discussion of integrity, Maister states a key point that "integrity cannot be judged by what you advocate, only by that which you always do" (Maister, 2005, p. 28). In a discussion of sociological roots of professional ethics, Yeaman points out that a code of ethics "exists in regard to the propriety of a professional group's behavior" (Yeaman, 2004b, p. 14).

Because being ethical is a consulting behavior, its change may be caused by a consultants' knowledge of professional ethics

and the consulting experiences. A professional code of ethics that lists all proper and improper behaviors a consultant needs to be aware of is at best a reference of professional conducts. Blake and Carroll state that "a code of ethics by itself is unlikely to stimulate real, day-to-day behavior change" (Blake & Carroll, 1989, p. 99). The efforts by the AECT Ethics Committee and TechTrends to discuss ethical scenarios to show how ethics may guide people to solve problems are necessary and effective. These efforts facilitate such changes in consulting behaviors, and thus, promote the ethical practice of instructional technology consulting. Professional organizations, such as AECT, must take a lead to educate their members about professional code of ethics and make ever-lasting efforts to promote ethical practices of instructional technology consulting. It is important that such an effort should not only make professional code of ethics available, but also relevant to the consultants. Increasing the awareness of professional code of ethics "will increase the likelihood of adding value to out clients, out organizations, our field, ourselves, and the communities we affect through our work."(Guerra, 2006, p. 1043)

5.2. At the Community Level

Because being ethical is a consulting behavior, it needs supports from the professional communities. Professional communities refer to those professional groups in which individual consultants interact with other members of the group for professional learning, professional advancement, and business opportunities. Professional communities, according to the study participants, can be a local chapter of a larger professional organization or a virtual one in which professionals who share the same interests meet online. Professional communities are essential forces that can shape instructional technology consulting and promote the ethical

practice. While the educational efforts to increase awareness of professional ethics by the AECT Ethics Committee (Yeaman et al., 2008) mentioned above should be encouraged, the role that professional communities play in promoting ethical practice of instructional technology consulting cannot be ignored. These professional communities are often great sources of guidance and support for many individual consultants when they run into a difficult ethics issue. Various efforts to promote ethical practice at this level can make professional code of ethics relevant and personal to individual consultants.

It must be mentioned that professional communities that meet online (asynchronously or synchronously) become popular. The study participants used them actively to seek advice and moral support from colleagues and friends in these online professional communities. When the study participants ran into an ethics issue, they would use emails, Web sites, and blogs to communicate the case with other professionals in the community. They would write their ethics issues and dilemmas out in the Web sites and blogs with confidential information concealed to seek advice from the others. This is a very effective and efficient way to obtain advice and support from other professionals in the field. Two study participants share the blog discussions with their clients and use it as another communication channel to provide a professional reference to resolve ethics issues with their clients. One study participant comments on this stating, "It is so powerful and so convincing when the whole community speaks." (Participant 6) To promote ethical practice of instructional technology consulting, support from professional communities should be made available and relevant to individual consultants.

5.3. At the Personal Level

Because being ethical is a consulting behavior, it is guided by norms of the profession and values of individual consultants who claim to be part of the profession (Banks, 2004). To promote ethical practice of instructional technology consulting, individual consultants are as important as those professional organizations and professional communities. Because many ethics issues in consulting are not just black and white but grey, individual consultants should have their own personal principles to follow. These principles are the bottom line of their professional life and represent their personal values reflected by the following questions that the study participants ask themselves when they run into those "grey zones."

- Is my consulting service what the client really needs?
- Is my consulting service beneficial to the public at large?
- Will my decision hurt my clients, other stake holders, and other people in any circumstances?
- What is the real value I can bring to my clients?
- What are the impacts of my decisions on my professional life in the future?
- Would I feel comfortable if I needed to explain my decisions to my colleagues and other professionals in the field?
- Would I feel comfortable if my consulting service were reported in a local TV channel or a local newspaper?
- Would I feel good about facing my wife and my children after I made the decision?

By emphasizing the importance of personal principles in instructional technology consulting, it is hoped that individual consultants can have an internal yardstick to go

by in their consulting practices. This is similar to "self-monitoring ethical behaviors" to avoid ethical problems suggested by other scholars (Yeaman, et al., 2008, p.309).

5.4. Summary

The factors that can affect professional ethics of instructional technology consultants are diverse from the national laws to religious beliefs (Yeaman, et al., 2008). There is no single solution to all the ethics problems. Only when the professional organizations, professional communities, and individual professionals work together, can we really promote the ethical practice of instructional technology consulting.

6. Conclusion

The study explores the meaning of being ethical in instructional technology consulting from reflections on the lived experiences by instructional technology consultants. It reveals the essence of being ethical in instructional technology consulting as an essential consulting behavior with real and solid consequences rather than a measure or judgment of a behavior against a code of professional ethics. The paper also discusses the implications for promoting the ethical practice of instructional technology consulting. The implications suggest that to promote ethical practice of instructional technology consulting, professional organizations, professional communities, and individual instructional technology consultants need to work together. As a researcher, I am so glad to see through literature reviews and in my own study the fact that professional organizations, professional communities, and individual professionals are working together and making a continuous effort to promote ethical practices of instructional technology consulting.

As a study, this paper contributes to the study of ethics through a new lens by exploring reflective lived experiences of instructional technology consultants. However, as most of ethics issues involve both the consultants and the clients, future research may explore being ethical in instructional technology consulting from the clients' perspectives and reveal their lived experiences of being ethical in instructional technology consulting. The discrepancy in perspectives of being ethical between the consultants and the clients would give us real insights to resolve ethics issues in instructional technology consulting. Finally, this paper is not intended to give exclusive answers to the research questions. It is only hoped that this paper will contribute to a greater awareness and understanding of being ethical and promote ethical practice of instructional technology consulting.

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