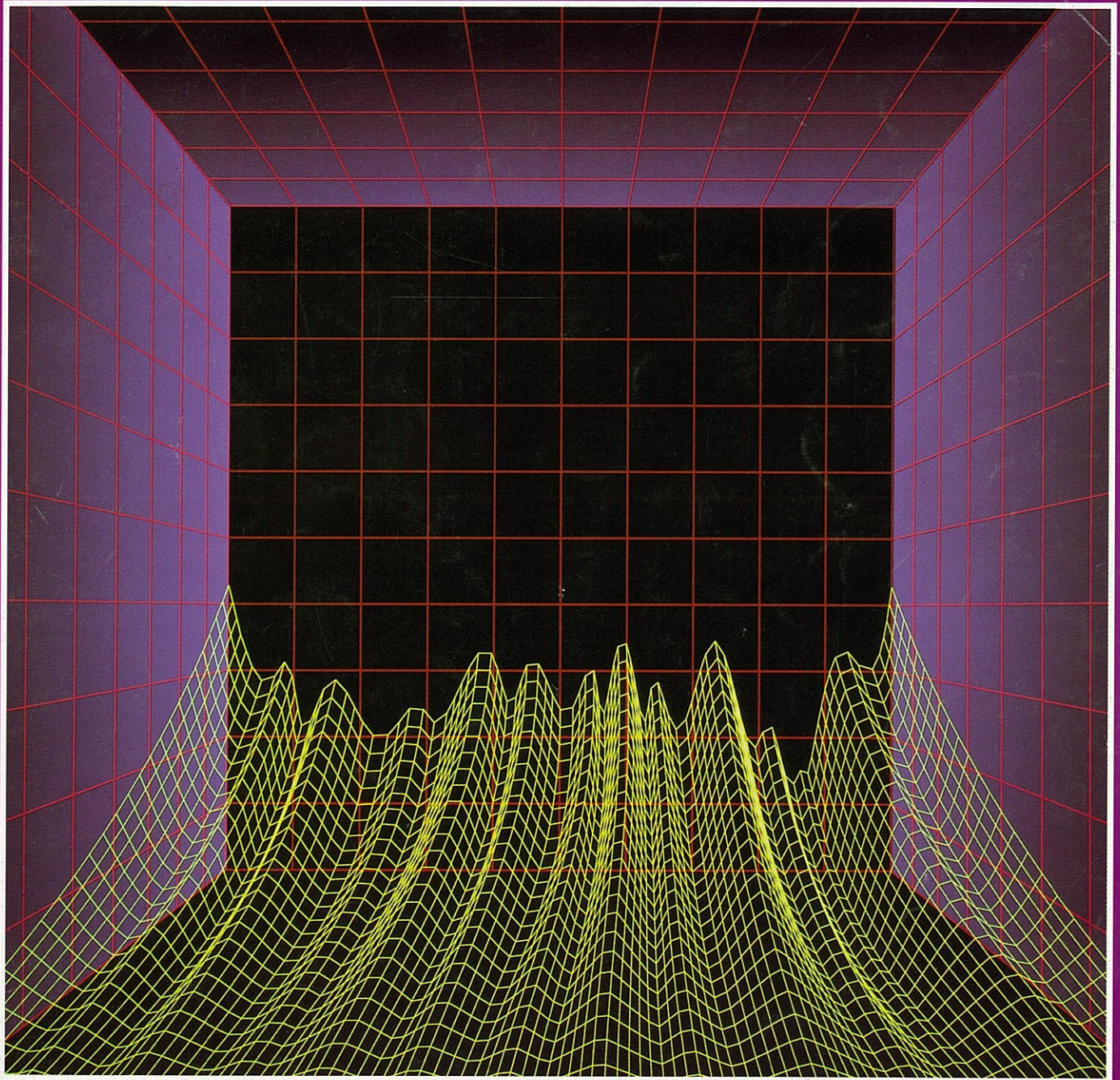


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**PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**

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**October 1994**



## **Sustainable Development:**

**CAN A COMMUNITY PROSPER WITHOUT GROWTH?**

# Ethics

## Ethics Inquiries

In 1993-1994, ICMA received more than 125 telephone inquiries from members seeking ethics advice. The following inquiries and advice were reviewed and approved by the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct, the committee of the Executive Board that oversees ICMA's ethics education and enforcement program. The advice is based on the ICMA Code of Ethics and on the Rules of Procedure for Enforcement, which are published in *WHO'S WHO in Local Government Management*. Each of the following inquiries has been altered to protect the identities of the callers. If you have an ethics question, call Mary Grover, ICMA's ethics adviser, at 202/962-3673. (There are no dumb ethics questions, and we have not heard them all!)

### Political Activity

A former elected official, seeking a vacant judicial appointment that would be made by the governor, asked a member to write a letter of recommendation, and the member wondered if it would be appropriate to do so. She was advised to be wary of the political nature of the process. It is not unethical per se for a member to speak objectively about her experience with a former elected official; however, she should not advocate one candidate over another in an appointment process in which the decision may be made on purely political considerations. The member also was advised that, once her letter has been mailed to the commission and to the candidate, it is out of her hands. She might see her words next in a political pamphlet or in a letter to the editor, whether for appointment to this office or for a campaign for the next.

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A member wondered if he should attend a fundraiser of his former mayor,

now a candidate for the state legislature. He was advised that participation in the fundraiser would be partisan political activity and therefore inappropriate. Although Tenet 7, as written, suggests that a member might participate in political activity to the extent that it did not "impair performance as a professional administrator," the Committee on Professional Conduct consistently has interpreted this tenet to mean the broader caveat: "Refrain from all partisan political activities." The point of locating the ethical/unethical line is not to walk as close to the buried mines as possible but rather to avoid the minefield.

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A local school board was seeking a capital improvement levy from the voters, and a member was asked to serve on the steering committee. The school superintendent has developed an excellent five-year capital improvement plan, and the school board now is trying to put the funding in place for it. The member was advised that she could serve ethically on the steering committee if her role were to advise and counsel but that she should avoid participation if she were expected to raise money for the campaign or speak publicly in support of the levy. It would be preferable if she could get a resolution of support from her elected officials and put them front-and-center on the issue.

## Commentary

### Organizational Development: Planned Change in an Unplanned, Changing World

From reading the current literature on management in the public or private sector, you might conclude that the concept of organizational development

is new. In fact, the realization that organizations are involved in and surrounded by constant change is an ancient one. Even as long ago as 1513 A.D., Niccolo Machiavelli cautioned that a leader must "consider not only present difficulties but also future." This was as sound advice then as it is now.

Change for the wrong reasons is inappropriate and may be harmful to an organization and its members. Change for change's sake, so that the organization or its leadership can appear progressive, is a terrible waste of energy and effort. Planned change must be established to accomplish more effectively an organization's goals and objectives. The goals of change are to bring the organization closer to its mission and to prepare for future challenges.

In Warren Bennis's book *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, he cautioned that an organization should never settle for rhetorical change. Significant change cannot simply be decreed. Change cannot be implemented successfully without the full support of the organization's executive management. Members of the organization will need to be led through change and development periods, not pushed through them.

### What Is Organizational Development?

Organizational development is a process in which the goal is to help organizations achieve greater effectiveness. The main focus of organizational development is on improving the total system so that the organization, its subgroups, and its members have a greater ability to assess and solve their own problems. This process is based on behavioral-science knowledge and practices, and it involves the creation and management of change. Organizational development activities must consider both micro-concepts, such as leadership, group dynamics, and work design, and the macro-concepts of the organization's strategic planning, structure, and environmental relations.

Two categories of change agent may conduct an intervention at any level in an organization. The first category includes external consultants who are hired by the management of the organization. External consultants are those people who specialize in organizational

development or such a related field as career planning, stress management, or job design.

When entering into a contract with an external consultant, the leaders of the organization should check references from past clients. They also would be prudent to find out in what professional associations the consultant retains membership. The educational background, experience, and skills of the consultant must be relevant to the problem faced by the organization. The external consultant's objective is not to solve your organization's problems but rather to help its members diagnose the problems, plan and implement change, and evaluate and institutionalize it.

The second category of change agent is that of the internal consultant. Internal consultants include specialists in development or related fields. The fact that the internal consultant is a member of the organization can be an advantage, as the internal consultant is usually accepted more quickly by organizational members and already has an understanding of the entity's culture and flow of power. A possible problem with using an internal consultant is that the person may suffer from a lack of objectivity or a fear of reprisals.

### Diagnosis, Implementation, and Management of Change

Once the organizational leaders have chosen a change agent, they must begin the process of understanding how the organization and its members currently are functioning. The organization's members must work with the change agent to discover the causes of the organizational problems. Systematically, the consultant must develop the appropriate interventions to solve these problems and to enhance effectiveness.

There are four commonly used methods of collecting information for use in the diagnosis process: questionnaires, interviews, observations, and such unobtrusive techniques as records checks. These techniques often are combined to obtain the most balanced and complete data possible. The diagnosis should include a detailed analysis of the organization's methods of product/service delivery, structure, methods of information dissemination, human resource management systems, and culture.

The implementation of planned

change is in reality change management, and one of the most difficult activities in change management is creating readiness for the intervention. Without the total commitment of all group members, the intervention cannot be truly effective. The consultant must try to include all key group members in the change process to overcome resistance to change. The members of the organization should be able to understand and follow willingly a credible vision of where the group should be, compared with where it is now.

Once the consultant has developed support for the intervention and has begun managing the transition, the next step in effective change management will be to sustain the momentum of the intervention. The success of the intervention can be supported by the creation of activities and structures that provide the basis for change. New resources and training also may be necessary to reinforce the group's progress toward the desired goal or vision.

### Path Not Without Its Hazards

The path of a change agent is not without its hazards. As Machiavelli noted, "There is no more delicate matter than to set up as a leader in the introduction of changes." To be a change agent takes courage and caring. Any organization, public or private, must seek constantly a greater understanding of itself, its environment, and how future trends may affect them.

Organizations, group members, and the world that touches them are in a constant state of change. Without the benefit of forecasting and strategic planning, any organization will be destined simply to muddle through from crisis to crisis. The principles and practices of organizational development allow an organization to gain a better understanding of itself and its future, and to establish a course of action that will lead it closer to its mission.

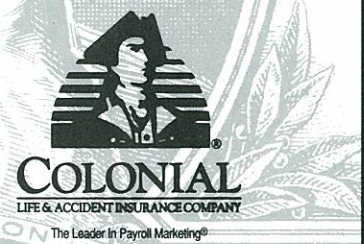
—Stephen Ramirez  
Shift Commander, Police Department  
Juno Beach, Florida

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