

## **OBM Tips for Managers, Consultants, and Entrepreneurs: The New BACB Compliance Code**



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In the September 2014 issue of the BACB Newsletter, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BACB®) announced a change that can have a significant and positive effect on the field. Effective January 1, 2016 the BACB® Professional and Ethical Compliance Code (copyright 2014 BACB, all rights reserved) will replace the current Guidelines for Responsible Conduct and Professional Ethical and Disciplinary Standards, and will be enforced by the BACB. The new code appears to encompass recent trends in the field (e.g., computer-based technologies), and will enhance research, teaching, and practice in behavior analysis. As the date for implementation of the Compliance Code approaches, many behavior analysts will be studying it to ensure that their current and future work is consistent with the new ethical standards, while others will be reviewing it as part of their evaluation of potential new work they are pursuing. If a new job or promotion expands an individual's responsibilities beyond the direct implementation of a given area of clinical service, then the new code will apply to these other areas of behavior-analytic work, including behavior analytic management, supervision, or consultation.

The 2009 survey on the employment circumstances of ABA practitioners conducted by the Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA) found that approximately 25% of the Board Certified Behavior Analyst® (BCBA®) respondents reported that consulting was part of their work. Almost half of all BCBA respondents reported that their work activities included administrative or supervisory work, and around 40% of respondents were self-employed. Those data indicate that a large group of behavior analysts primarily work as managers, supervisors, business owners, or consultants. Clinical expertise, though valuable, might only encompass a portion of their daily work duties. For these individuals, both the current BACB Guidelines for Responsible Conduct and the new Professional and Ethical Compliance Code suggest that it is important for

them to develop skills in organizational behavior management (OBM).



Suppose you have been thoroughly trained in clinical applications of behavior analysis, including extensive supervised experience, and have been an exemplary employee for so long that you have been promoted to a management position. You are now responsible for the performance of a group of practitioners. The new Compliance Code has several provisions that apply to your new duties. Your behavioral services, as that term is defined in the glossary of the Code (p. 23), are now centered on managing and supervising others. Programs you design to improve the performance of the practitioners who report to you must be based on the science of behavior analysis (Code 1.01) and conceptually accurate (Code 4.01). To deliver those services competently (Code 1.02), you should have supervised experience and training in staff management. In other words, a promotion into management has put you in a position of practicing outside of the boundaries of your current competencies. If this were to happen, you would be responsible for developing the new skills in these novel areas. Where do you start?

An initial responsibility of new business owners, consultants, or managers is to identify their new assignments and assess their individual strengths and weaknesses in light of those new responsibilities. Even for behavior analysts who have no training or supervised experience in applying behavior-analytic principles to organizational management or system improvements, those principles still apply; the behavior analysts just need to learn to apply them to new tasks (e.g., training and supervising practitioners, advising organizational clients). For instance, positive

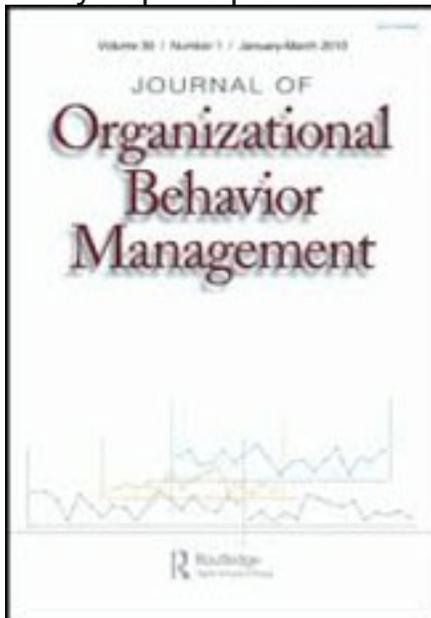
reinforcement can accelerate performance in business situations just as it does in clinical situations. The key is to take a step back, evaluate the new areas of behavior-analytic application, and expand the analyses.



Behavior analysts should have a fundamental understanding of reinforcement processes and procedures, either through university clinical practica, animal lab experience, self-management projects, or some other training or work experience. In applying those fundamentals to areas such as training and supervising staff, behavior analysts should be careful not to follow management fads like annual performance appraisals and "stretch goals." They would do well to consider developing procedures for assessing staff preferences and measuring the reinforcing effects of those items, and for avoiding the use of delayed and non-contingent reinforcement procedures with their staff.

Just as with other behavior-change programs, programs for improving staff performance need to be function-based and least restrictive, and incorporate objective measurement systems. Organizational functional assessments like the Performance Diagnostic Checklist (see Austin, Weatherly, & Gravina, 2005) can be used to identify barriers to desirable performance (Codes 3.01, 4.07) and identify the type of performance-improvement initiative that is best suited for a given problem. Management methods should emphasize shaping and positively reinforcing good performance, not simply using reprimands and corrections when performance is poor (Code 4.08). Any corrective feedback should be followed up to ensure that targeted behaviors are being properly reinforced. The effects of performance-improvement interventions should be measured objectively to ensure that ineffective methods are revised and data-based decisions are made (Code 3.01b). If a management system is primarily based on addressing those who are doing poorly and ignoring those doing well, then it is not conceptually or empirically consistent with behavior-

analytic principles and best practice standards.



When transitioning to a new management or consultant role, behavior analysts should consult journals that offer peer-reviewed evidence on effective management practices. Reading the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, and others can help behavior analysts keep up-to-date on best practices in performance management. These journals and other training opportunities can help enhance your skill development. It is important to seek feedback and establish feedback systems with your peers, supervisees, and mentors to keep refining your skills (Code 1.03).

In summary, behavior analysts who transition from direct care and other front-line positions into management or consulting should thoroughly evaluate the ethical and practical parameters of their new work assignments. It is good for the field to have skilled front-line workers advance through the ranks to positions from which they can help teach their knowledge and skills to new behavior analysts. It is equally important that, when these opportunities arise, behavior analysts remember the boundaries of their competence and their ethical obligation to expand those boundaries to encompass the skills required to perform effectively in their new positions. The science of behavior is applicable across many areas, but it's up to each behavior analyst to work with colleagues and mentors to ensure that they are as good at managing and consulting as they are at providing effective clinical interventions (Code 7.01).

## References

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