

ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS AT HARRIS & ASSOCIATES: DEFINING & PRESERVING A HERITAGE

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Case Synopsis

Engineer Carl Harris and two colleagues founded Harris & Associates (www.harris-assoc.com) in Lafayette, California, in 1974. Over the next three decades Harris & Associates established a reputation for reliable, high quality civil design and project and construction management services, specializing in public works projects such as water and wastewater treatment plants, hospitals, schools, roads and highways. The company grew from its original three employees to a workforce of some 400 by the early 2000s. Most employees continued to work out of the Concord headquarters in northern California but with a strong southern California branch office and several smaller regional offices west of the Rockies. Throughout this period of growth, Harris & Associates was a privately-held corporation owned and operated by its shareholders (composed of Harris & Associate employees who purchased stock in their company) through its elected Board of Directors.

By 2004, the increased size of the company and the dispersion of its staff into offices throughout the western United States created new challenges for the maintenance of Harris's long-standing mission, ethics, and values --- which, by all accounts, had been a distinct competitive strength --- throughout the organization. Furthermore, founder Carl Harris was in the process of retiring from day-to-day involvement in company leadership and long-time leaders such as Guy Erickson (President), Jim Parmley (VP) and Neil McCosker (VP) were beginning to plan for their own retirements. In the context of such growth, dispersion, and major leadership transition, how best could the company define and preserve its strong values and ethics and minimize future risks of the sort of ethical misconduct that seemed to plague more and more of its competitors?

Case Learning Objectives

The Harris & Associates case is appropriate for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses in business ethics and organizational development. By working through the Harris & Associates case, current and future managers will wrestle with the options and choices necessarily made in the course of developing an appropriate and effective ethics and values statement for an organization. How broadly or narrowly should the project be construed? Should the organization develop its own program internally or rely on an outside vendor? How might outside consultants relate to the organization's own leadership and staff? How might the process mobilize the expertise and gain the ownership of the organization's employees? The case culminates in questions about how to communicate and implement the newly crafted statement of ethics and values to all segments of the company. Students are challenged to design an ethics communication, training and implementation program for Harris & Associates.

Introduction

Harris & Associates founder and Chair of the Board of Directors, Carl Harris, experienced a recurring concern in 2004 as he thought about the company he had built over the previous three decades. Of course, he felt a good deal of pride and satisfaction as well. What started out in 1974 with Carl, another engineer, and an office support person --- his two “associates” --- had grown to nearly 400 employees, the largest number of whom worked out of the Concord, California, headquarters, but with others based in several branch offices around the western United States.

Industry recognition began to come: Harris & Associates was recognized by the *Engineering News Record* as one of its “Top 100 Construction Management” firms and one of its “Top 40 Program Management” firms. *Trenchless Technology* recognized Harris & Associates as one of its “Top 50 Design” firms. Business was strong; new opportunities beckoned; talented people lined up to apply for jobs at Harris & Associates. Harris’s reputation and brand were strong in the industry.

What concerned Carl Harris was how to ensure the continuation of the characteristics that had made Harris & Associates what it was by 2004. “For me,” Carl explained, “this really was the primary motivation for the ethics and values project. It was not a defensive or reactive move based on ethical breakdowns in our company. It was a feeling that we were at a stage where we must be proactive in defining our company values and our way of doing business. It’s not even that we wanted to be critical of our competitors but we simply did not want to drift away from our values toward whatever others were doing in the industry.”

What could or should be done to perpetuate the ethics and values for which Harris & Associates was known? Their corporate reputation had been built up over three decades but one had only to read the daily newspapers to see how good reputations and sound ethics could overnight take a huge hit from which they might not recover. The fall of legendary, highly-reputed accounting firm Arthur Andersen was a case in point. The big players in the construction management field, Halliburton and Bechtel, were frequent targets of investigators, litigators, and journalists, whether always fairly or not. No company was immune to criticism and serious risk.

Harris & Associates had experienced very little in the way of ethical or legal missteps over the years, but in 2004 one of the senior executives crossed an important behavioral line which led to his removal. “I certainly agree with Carl,” Guy Erickson said, “that the proactive ‘preserve the company values’ theme was primary. But by 2004 I had been president for two years and Carl, as former president and now chairman of the board, was less involved in day-to-day operations. The necessary removal of a senior executive for misconduct was a powerful message to me that we must pay more attention to our ethics

from top to bottom in the company.” “Remember also,” Vern Phillips added, “as recently as 2002 Carl himself immediately called out and stopped a situation in our northwest regional office that violated our values and ethics. A proposal to a prospective client was found to list as a member of the Harris team a talented individual who was not actually a current Harris employee --- but who had agreed to defect from his current employer to Harris if the contract came through. This was a clear deception that contradicted what Harris stood for.” Guy Erickson knew of similar situations among Harris competitors where “a company might send in a team of its star performers to make a proposal for a project --- but then take those stars off the team when the project actually began. Others might do that but that is not our way.”

Vern continued, “On pretty good evidence, we also were aware that some of our competitors were compromising both ethical and legal standards to curry favor with prospective clients and win contracts. For example, at Harris & Associates, our year-end holiday party was an internal celebration for our people. But at least one of our competitors invited *clients* to its end-of-year party and rigged its best gift giveaways to go to precisely those clients who would be deciding where upcoming contracts would be awarded.” In an increasingly competitive environment like this, what could Harris & Associates do to stay on course, resist temptation, and take the ethical high road --- the one that had brought the company to its current place?

Two other factors played a role in Harris’s growing concern about preserving the company heritage and minimizing future risk. First: the growth and dispersion of the company. By 2004 Harris & Associates was approaching 400 employees. These employees were no longer all based in the northern California (Concord) headquarters or the southern California (Irvine) satellite. Now there were eight other branch offices from Seattle to Las Vegas – and this expansion was likely to continue.

When there were 100 or 200 employees based in one or two locations, team building and personal mentoring served well enough to inculcate Harris & Associates values, ethics, and ways of doing business in each employee. Carl and his leadership team were an up-close-and-personal, living, breathing ethics and values resource for everyone in the company. They could personally embody and communicate the ethics and values. They were omnipresent ethics consultants, trainers, and mentors. “Carl led by example,” Guy Erickson says, “and he was always clear and decisive if he saw anything starting to happen that wasn’t up to our standards and ethics.”

But when the number of employees doubles or triples, when hundreds of miles separate multiple branch offices, what replaces that personal mentoring? If an ethics question concerning how to deal with a difficult client or situation arises in a branch office, wouldn’t it be likely that, absent Carl or other veteran Harris leaders, a newer recruit might offer something like “Well, here is how we handled decisions like that when I was at Halliburton” (or Bechtel or). Into the values vacuum, who knows what will come?

Could Carl stand by and watch this happen? Could anything be done proactively to ensure the preservation of the Harris way of doing business in all locations where the company expanded?

“We prided ourselves on being a maverick firm,” commented Vern Phillips. “We didn’t want lots of org charts and official policies and bureaucracy. We were a family. But by 2004, with our growth and expansion, with more staff and more regional offices, we realized that we really must be more intentional and clear about how we operate. Otherwise people, especially our new hires, might be confused. This was not just true about our ethics and values but about all aspects of our organization and management: it was time to define and clarify what our company was all about.”

Table 1: Harris Growth from company founding in 1974

Year	Employees	Branch Offices	Gross Revenues
1984	36	0	\$ 3 million
1994	140	2	\$14 million
2004	382	9	\$58 million

The second factor, Carl Harris realized, was that the founding generation was approaching retirement age. By 2004 Carl himself was already making Idaho his primary residence and was no longer involved in the day-to-day operations. Carl’s longtime associates like Guy Erickson (President), Jim Parmley (VP), and Neil McCosker (VP) were all in their sixties. A major leadership change at the top was going to happen during the next decade. “If we don’t have strong ethical leadership from the top,” Carl said, “it’s not going to happen. We needed to go into this transitional phase very clear about our ethics and values.” While it seemed that most younger managers were fairly well integrated into the Harris values, culture, and way of doing business, this informal training by itself might not be enough to ensure long-term preservation of the Harris way. Marketing and Communications Manager Tanya Wollman added that “undertaking this project was also perfect timing from a corporate marketing and recruiting stand point. We were in the midst of major growth in staff, markets and services. Going through the process of really solidifying our core values, mission and vision became the new launching point for all of our marketing campaigns.”

Something needed to be done and it started with defining as carefully as possible what were the values and ethics of the Harris way as it had developed over the past thirty years. Obviously, defining one’s ethics and values is only the first step in a larger process. But it was a crucially important step toward success. Harris had to get it right.

Company Background

After earning his bachelors and masters degrees in civil engineering at San Jose State University, Carl Harris worked for four years (1967-71) for Consoer Townsend, a large engineering firm headquartered in the eastern United States. At Consoer Carl became colleagues and friends with engineers Dave Newton, Jim Parmley, and Larry Timmer, all of whom would later play important roles at Harris & Associates. “Consoer,” Jim Parmley said, “was the kind of big, bureaucratic, impersonal organization where employees joked that you had to fill out a set of requisition forms just to buy a box of pencils!” Looking back, the Consoer Townsend experience was a defining one for Carl and his colleagues. Harris & Associates would become the antithesis of the Consoer culture. Harris & Associates was about valuing, trusting, and empowering employees. It was about family, sharing, fun, and celebration.

In 1971 Carl Harris, Dave Newton, and Bob Mimiaga joined Lampman & Associates, a smaller firm based in Los Angeles. It grated on Carl that some of the company's practices crossed into ethical grey areas, such as billing a city for work that was barely underway and not yet completed; “Don’t worry, they’ll pay up right away without questioning,” Carl was told. In 1974, Carl left Lampman and, with sanitary engineer Dave Newton and office manager Roxie Leal, founded Harris & Associates in Lafayette, California. Their company was launched with contracts for wastewater treatment plant construction in the towns of Rio Vista and Ceres, California. Rio Vista’s city engineer at the time, Neil McCosker, would join Harris & Associates in the early 1990s and soon after begin serving at the Vice-President and Board of Directors level. Construction manager Jim Parmley, and engineers Larry Timmer and Bob Mimiaga joined the staff in the mid-1970s to help with the growing construction and project management business.

From the beginning Harris & Associates decided to concentrate on the public works arena rather than serve private real estate developers and builders. Carl described the choice this way: “A city or county agency would always know that we would not one day work for them and the next day show up representing a private developer seeking something from that same public agency. It eliminated a huge source of potential conflicts of interest.” Working with Caltrans and various state, county, and city departments and agencies, Harris & Associates designed and managed public infrastructure including water and wastewater treatment plants, roads, hospitals, schools, and the like. They took pride in carefully and responsibly managing budgets for communities and the public --- and delivering high quality, reliable engineering, consulting, and management services from project start to finish. The workforce and number of branch offices grew steadily and organically through the decades. In 1980 engineer Guy Erickson came on board and by 2002 was appointed President of the company, succeeding Carl Harris who backed off from the day-to-day operations side but continued to serve as Chair of the Board. In 1988 engineer Vern Philips joined the team and was named a Vice President in 1995. Marie Shockley, Vice President for Human Resources, joined Harris in 1990.



Harris & Associates was a privately-held California corporation. After one year of service all Harris employees were eligible to participate in an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) --- and most took advantage of the opportunity. ESOP participants did not automatically have shareholder voting rights. To be recognized as a voting shareholder required at least five years of recognized leadership and significant contribution to the company. The roughly 45 voting shareholders annually elected the Board of Directors. In 2004-05 the board chair was Carl Harris and among the other members were President Guy Erickson, VP/COO Neil McCosker, VP/Director of Marketing and Business Development Jim Parmley, and VP Vern Phillips.

If there was one characteristic for which Carl Harris and his associates were best known, it would be how they respected, valued, and cared for their employees. The employee stock ownership plan was but one example. Generous in salary and in benefits (health care, dental coverage, retirement savings plans, educational support (\$1500 per year), and gym memberships (\$200/year)), Harris tried to take care of its people. One of its most distinctive benefits was the ten or twelve vacation homes the company had leased in Lake Tahoe, San Diego, Mendocino, Pismo Beach, Mammoth and other resort areas, and which were available to *every* employee for one week per year (location and schedule based on seniority) for only a nominal house cleaning fee.

Ethics Project and Process Decisions

After a number of informal conversations along the lines of “we really need to think about developing a code of ethics of some sort to put in print the standards we believe in,” Chairman Carl Harris and President Guy Erickson decided to invite a local organizational ethics consultant to a board/executive meeting to discuss the development of an ethics program. On December 9, 2004, David W. Gill came to company headquarters in Concord on the recommendation of Harris VP Vern Phillips, whose wife had taken a graduate level ethics course from Gill.

The ethics consultant’s role in the initial discussion with the Harris board members was simply to listen to their concerns and then outline some possible action steps. Two basic choices were highlighted: First: the board needed to decide on its ethics project leadership --- whether (a) to try to lead and execute the ethics project entirely in-house, using the available expertise on Harris’s existing management staff, (b) to outsource the project to one of the larger ethics and compliance consulting organizations, or (c) to pursue a middle path utilizing a local expert working closely with the company in a process customized to the Harris context. Clearly, there were financial as well as competence judgments to be made by Harris at this point. “We have always used consultants when appropriate,” Vern explained, “some from big firms, some from smaller ones. As we moved toward this project it became clear to all of us that working with David Gill as our ethics consultant was the way to go. We never seriously looked at any other options once we started talking.”

Second: a choice needed to be made regarding the scope of the project --- whether (a) to create a minimal (but adequate) code of ethical standards along with a workable reporting, trouble-shooting, and decision-making system, or (b) to take a broader, holistic approach that would seek proactively to locate the code and response components in a careful alignment with the mission, vision, and core cultural values of the company. Gill pointed out that the first, limited, approach might serve to contain risk and minimize damage from most significant future breeches of ethics. For some practitioners, business ethics in its essence could be reduced to a matter of clear standards, rational decision-making, and certain enforcement. The second, more holistic, approach would be more expensive and time-consuming but, in the long term, could deliver a deeper and more effective response to the concerns expressed by Carl Harris and the board members. “From my perspective,” Guy reflected, “it would have been a waste of time and money to create an isolated code of ethics without relating it to our mission and culture.”

With the initial meeting over, informal discussion continued in the corridors and offices of Harris & Associates over the next six months. Progress was limited to two or three “what’s up/how are you doing?” e-mails as a deluge of other work responsibilities fell on all the principals. Finally, on July 26,

2005, Board Chair Carl Harris, President Guy Erickson, and Senior Vice President Vern Phillips met with consultant David Gill and agreed on a five-month project that would run from August through December with approximately 120 hours of consulting time for Gill to guide the company and its leadership through a process to identify and articulate the Harris & Associates mission, vision, core values, and code of ethics. Working with consultant Gill would be an ethics project group (the “EPG”) composed of Carl Harris, Guy Erickson, Vern Phillips, Neil McCosker, Jim Parmley, and Marie Shockley --- the senior executive leadership of the company in the Concord headquarters --- plus Corporate Marketing Manager Tanya Wollman (who had joined Harris in 2000).

First: Get the Mission Straight

During the first three weeks of August 2005, the initial ethics project goal was to figure out and articulate the mission and vision of Harris & Associates. The goal of organizational ethics and values for Harris was not just “staying out of court and out of jail” (a minimalist, damage-control approach). Rather, the point of Harris ethics would be to provide guidance on “what kind of company we need to be” and “how we need to treat one another --- and all of our stakeholders --- in order to excel and succeed in accomplishing our mission and achieving our vision”

As the EPG began, Carl Harris explained that “Unlike many other companies, our ‘bottom line’ is not our ‘bottom line,’ if I could describe it that way. Our company wants to be financially successful and we have been. But our focus is not merely on our financial ROI but on people --- on our employees, clients, and communities. The irony is that focusing on people *is* good for business. For example, something like 70% of our business is repeat business. So in the end it makes good business sense to invest in our ethics.”

Intensive study of Harris’s internal publications, external marketing and advertising presentations, interviews of Carl Harris and other old-timers and current leaders, and comparative study of mission and vision statements from industry competitors provided the initial ideas and concepts. Vigorous round table debate in the EPG distilled a brief statement describing the core business of Harris & Associates. What, in a nutshell, did Harris do for its clients and other key stakeholders (the mission)? What, in a nutshell, did Harris envision becoming as a company (the vision)? What key words would make clear Harris’s products and services (in contrast to a generic business statement)? What key words would differentiate Harris from its competitors in the same industry? What was it that Harris delivered to its clients (what product, service, change) in light of which clients would pay its invoices?

After three weeks of research, discussion, and frequent reiteration of the core ideas and terminology a consensus emerged in the EPG that the Harris mission was to “help our clients succeed.” Harris people

are consulting engineers and project managers for hire. How do they help their clients succeed? Through “industry-leading management and consulting services.” Harris’s vision for its company was not to be the biggest “gorilla” in the industry but to be “the excellence and integrity leader” in the arenas where it operated.

But thinking back over its three decades of history and development, Carl Harris also insisted that the company didn’t just help its *clients* succeed --- it also helped its *employees* and *communities* succeed. These two latter groups also had to be named in the mission statement. Designing and managing publically funded public works projects was a responsibility gladly accepted and helping communities succeed was a critical part of what the company wanted to do. But so too, the company existed to help its own employees succeed in their careers. Carl explained “Personally, I saw no compelling reason to grow Harris any bigger – it was a wonderful, quality, manageable size already. But for the sake of our creative, innovative, entrepreneurial people the company must remain open to growth and development.” In summary, then, the mission was to “help clients, employees, and communities succeed through industry-leading management and consulting services.” (see Exhibit A: “The Harris Way” for the complete statement). At last the mission and vision were captured in phrases that got everyone on the EPG nodding in agreement: “Yes, this is Harris. This is what we are about.”

Because it was their job to be concerned with every aspect of the entire company, the primary creators and guardians of the mission and vision were, of necessity, the top executives and the board of directors. These were the roles best positioned to see --- and most responsible for --- the whole. Yet it would have violated the Harris culture for the mission and vision to be imposed by a simple edict from the top. Harris wanted broad buy-in --- as well as expertise, should there be any suggestions for improvement --- on its mission and vision statements. Thus, the statements were viewed and described as provisional, until all managers and employees in the company had an opportunity to examine and comment on them.

Second: Identify Core Values to Embed in the Corporate Culture

With a provisional statement of the Harris & Associates mission and vision in hand, the project turned to the broader question of the company culture. The EPG agreed that the achievement of the mission and vision was dependent not just on compliance with ethical rules but on building and nurturing an organizational culture that aligned with and empowered that mission and vision. Guy Erickson: “We always talked much more about culture than about a code at Harris.” What had been the chief characteristics of Harris’s culture that had produced the successful company of today? What characteristics were critical to maintaining excellence and success into the future as the leadership transitioned and the company expanded? These were questions about “core values.”

Since “culture” is not just a vague reference to the company as a whole entity but gets real in the concrete experience of working groups and branch offices, the managers of those micro-cultures needed to play a central role in defining the core values for Harris & Associates. Fortunately, seventy company leaders were already scheduled for a management retreat in late August at the Tenaya Lodge in Yosemite National Park. Vern Phillips: “We really got lucky because this meeting had been on the schedule long before we started the ethics project.” This was the perfect group to mobilize on the core cultural values part of the project.

On Friday, August 26, 2005, President Guy Erickson rolled out the provisional statement of Harris’s Mission and Vision before the Tenaya management group, explaining how and why it had been generated over the past month. Guy urged discussion and feedback, critical or otherwise, over the next two days of the retreat and over the coming month. Erickson then introduced ethics consultant David Gill who explained the culture and core values part of the project, why it was important and how Harris managers were going to attack it. He provided examples of core values and culture from three or four other successful companies.

The seventy Harris managers present were then given a one-page worksheet (see Exhibit B) and asked to fill it out on their own in twenty minutes or so. Then they were asked to form breakout discussion groups with three or four others, to brainstorm together for twenty or thirty minutes the critical, core values and characteristics of Harris & Associates. After this individual reflection and group consensus building, one person from each group took a few minutes to rise and summarize their breakout group consensus and the highlights of their discussion. The worksheets were collected and the findings analyzed and distilled by the consultant into a working “core values 1.0” statement which was then circulated and discussed first by the EPG.

The goal of the core values phase of the project was to identify the four or five or six central, recurring concepts in the managerial feedback and figure out the one best, most helpful, single term to use for each headline “value.” Then an effort was made to be as inclusive as possible by utilizing much of the other terminology proposed by the managers in the brief explanatory elaborations under each core value headline term. In this way the core values, accompanied by their subheadings, provide a rich, “thick” meaning and message. The participating managers were more likely to “own” the values statement on seeing their language and nuance included in the larger statement. Consultant David Gill served as editor and “wordsmith” but with regular and intense back-and-forth conversations in the EPG. He also contributed some brief “slogans” to define each headline value term, e.g., “Integrity” . . . “Doing the right thing.” “Teamwork” . . . “Working Better Together.” (See Exhibit A for the full core values statement).

A “version 2.0” reflecting the input of the EPG was then e-mailed to all seventy of the managers who had participated in the August 26 meeting at Tenaya Lodge. “Is this what we were seeing and describing at Tenaya? Is this who we are and need to be as a company? Are these really our defining characteristics, the habits and attributes that matter most now and in the future? Take a careful, critical look and get back to us within the next two weeks with your affirmations, criticisms, or suggested changes.” The e-mail response from the managers was massively in favor of the emerging statement. The dozen or so responses with questions, criticism, and suggested modifications were followed up with emails and telephone calls to try to understand the issues and concerns better. A few minor tweaks were made as a result and version 3.0 was ready to roll out to the whole company --- though not yet to the public.

Third: Create A Helpful, Expert Code of Ethical Guidelines

Five weeks after the Tenaya management retreat, the company had long scheduled its annual “HarrisFest,” a two day gathering of as many Harris employees as possible for team and culture building, knowledge sharing and networking, celebration and orientation. HarrisFests alternated between Los Angeles and Oakland locations. Upwards of three-quarters of the Harris workforce was normally able to come together for these festive events. The 2005 Fest was scheduled for Friday, September 30, and Saturday, October 1. The Harris EPG was finally about to turn the spotlight on the creation of a code of ethics and who better to take the lead than the employees themselves? And where better to launch the project than during an hour at the HarrisFest? Vern Phillips: “We got lucky a second time. Just as the previously scheduled Tenaya retreat brought the culture and core values leaders together, now the long-scheduled HarrisFest brought virtually all of our people together.”

If the board of directors and top level executives were, and had to be, the mission and vision guardians and champions . . . if the working group, departmental, and branch office heads were, and had to be, the primary hands-on culture builders and tenders defining the core values . . . it would now fall to the rank-and-file in Harris’s business trenches to play the major role in creating and implementing ethical guidelines for the day-to-day business practices of the company. As Guy Erickson described it, “It was a natural extension of our culture of respecting all of our employees to ask their participation in creating our code of ethics. I had never thought of writing a code of ethics this way but it made perfect sense to all of us.” Vern Phillips added, “You can’t really expect people to embrace something if it is unilaterally created from above or outside and then crammed down their throat. Everybody needed to be involved. Their positive attitudes about the code since then have everything to do with how it was created.” Carl himself commented that “the HarrisFests have always been an extension of our “family” philosophy --- it’s about getting the Harris family together. It is a huge expense but has done so much to connect our people together and give them a sense of belonging to the whole. Writing our ethical guidelines in this context was exactly the right place to do it.”

The objective in mobilizing the rank-and-file to write the code of ethics was twofold: first, the EPG hoped to gain their expertise. After all, who knows the temptations, challenges, and positive opportunities in the marketing practice as well as a marketing person? Who knows the temptations, challenges, and positive opportunities in the building inspection practice as well as a building inspector? Those who know the practices and problems best and most intimately are the practitioners themselves. If Harris wanted a code that provided guidelines customized to the actual experiences of its people, it would have to be the people themselves who wrote them. The second objective, of course, was “ownership.” A code written by the people would likely be owned in a way that a code from an external, outside expert, or from upper management, could never achieve. For the Harris EPG, the strategy was obvious: mobilize the people to write the new code, starting at the HarrisFest.

On Saturday morning, October 1, 2005, in the Oakland Airport Hilton Grand Ballroom, Harris President Guy Erickson took the stage to roll out the new, provisional, mission and vision statements along with the new core values statement. He explained the strategic importance of developing a common, unifying statement of Harris’s mission, vision, and core values so that as the company moved forward, expanded, and brought in new people, everyone would share a common purpose and culture. He challenged everyone to study carefully the wording of the statements, discuss it among themselves, and get back with any and all suggestions, criticisms, and questions so that these could be reflected in the final edited version before it went public in January 2006.

Ethics consultant David Gill followed the president by describing the code of ethics project and explaining why the people’s expertise, leadership, and ownership was essential to its success. He called attention to the popular web site Wikipedia and the amazing degree of accuracy that fact-checking organizations had found there despite (or “because of”) its open, mass collaborative authorship. “Think of this exercise as writing guidelines for new employees in your work area,” Gill said. “What are the most important working guidelines you would give them if you were mentoring them one-on-one in person? As we expand, not all people coming into our work areas can have your personal mentoring close at hand every moment, so our backup plan is crucial: to provide a set of written guidelines.”

The three hundred or so attendees, sitting around tables of eight, took out a one-page code of ethics questionnaire (see Exhibit C) that asked them five questions: (1) what are the basic tasks that make up your work days?; (2) what basic, written guidelines should be given to a new (or uncertain) employee for each of those basic work practices, to avoid getting into trouble and to ensure excellence and ethics in the task?; (3) what are the most significant temptations and problems that can arise in your work area?; (4) what written guidelines would help new or uncertain employees avoid trouble or ethical missteps when

faced by each of these challenges?; and (5) can you suggest any other important rules or guidelines that should be part of our code of ethics, guiding all of us, all the time, at Harris & Associates?

After about 20 minutes of individual work on the survey forms, the participants were asked to huddle with three or four others at their table and take turns sharing what each of them had highlighted, discussing and clarifying things where needed. After about 30 minutes of breakout discussion the forms were collected in an envelope on each table. Participants were invited but not required to put their names and contact information on the forms to enable follow-up discussion if something they wrote wasn't clear. Most did identify themselves.

Over the next three weeks, the information on the 300 forms was painstakingly analyzed, summarized, and organized by the ethics consultant. A rudimentary version 1.0 of the emerging Code of Ethics was reviewed and discussed by the EPG. None of the dozen primary competitors of Harris & Associates had been willing/able to share their code of ethics with Harris for comparative purposes but Bechtel's code was publically available and, along with a few other professional (such as the Association of Civil Engineers) and corporate code examples, served as a helpful comparison. The Harris EPG decided to "front-load" the code by making as much of the guidance as possible apply to everyone in the company. The opening section summarized twelve general principles. Following the twelve general principles and their bullet-point elaborations came three brief sections addressing relations with clients, with business partners and sub-contractors, and with fellow-employees (see Exhibit A).

Once the EPG felt that it had a reasonable "version 2.0" that was ready to be critiqued by the whole Harris workforce, it was e-mailed to everyone with a request for a careful reading and an e-mail response affirming, questioning, and improving the product --- the mission, vision, and core values material as well as the ethical guidelines themselves. Roughly one-third of the workforce sent back a one-line message affirming the code as it was, one-third did not respond at all, and one-third sent back (mostly minor but a few major) suggestions for changes and improvements. Every suggestion and question was taken seriously and followed up by e-mails or, in some cases, phone conversations by the consultant, to be sure the point was heard and understood. The content of the code was tweaked accordingly wherever the EPG agreed that a change was justified. By mid-December the major work was done: a holistic, comprehensive, aligned account of the "Harris Way" -- the mission, vision, core values, and ethical guidelines of the company had been identified and articulated with the broad participation of virtually the whole Harris & Associates workforce.

Fourth: Outline a Reporting and Trouble Shooting Process for Ethical Problems

With the values and guidelines now identified, the final question was what employees should do if they encountered a problem or had a serious question about ethics? A section was thus added at the end of the Harris Way on “What to do if you have an ethics question --- or need to report a possible violation.” The wording of the section title was very deliberate: “if you have a question” . . . “report a possible violation.” Harris employees must not be afraid to raise questions. The process should not be worded in such a way that employees would be fearful that raising a question was equivalent to a formal accusation, with all that might entail. Three subsections followed. First was a checklist to help employees and managers reflect on whether a particular concern was important enough to take action.

- Is it illegal?
- Does it violate our company values and ethical guidelines?
- Does it violate the Golden Rule or our internal sense of right and wrong?
- Would we be doing this if it was the lead story in the news?
- Could someone be seriously and irresponsibly harmed?

Warning lights or red flags on any of these tests meant that Harris employees should report the question or concern.

Where and how should they report their questions and concerns? Harris did not like the concept of immediately and automatically escalating every problem by filing a report --- whether on a hotline or with upper management. After all, the EPG reasoned, how would we like to be treated? Answer: if we make a mistake or a bad decision, we would prefer that our colleagues come to us and ask us or even confront us about it. Harris wanted to maintain a culture of openness, respect, and candor. “If possible,” the Harris Way thus advised, “speak to the offender(s).” Or “ask a trusted colleague for advice and help.” Failing that, “report it to your supervisor,” or “report it to any supervisor or manager with whom you feel comfortable.” And finally, as last resorts, “report it to the HR Manager” or even “Report it to the President” if you wish. “You may submit your question or report anonymously if you feel it necessary,” the Harris Way counsels. Of course, if the recommended initial steps “seem dangerous, unwise, or unproductive,” employees should not hesitate to take the later steps. Harris certainly did not want to put anyone in danger; but many, if not most, problems are best dealt with immediately by colleagues closest to the situation.

Finally, the Harris Way process raised and answered the question “What happens to your ethics questions and reports?” Harris employees were assured that all questions and reports would be taken seriously, that retaliation was never allowed, and that, unless anonymous, inquirers and reporters would be acknowledged and informed on the case or question they submitted. If a supervisor could not resolve a case to everyone’s satisfaction, it could be reviewed (and appealed) all the way up to the board of

directors level for a final decision. Harris did not want a situation where ethics questions and problems disappeared into a black hole. Employees should know what happened to the questions they raised.

Communicate, Train, Implement

In January of 2006 a beautiful, spiral-bound, 23-page copy of “The Harris Way” was given to all 400 employees of Harris & Associates (see Exhibit A). Introductory statements from Carl Harris and Guy Erickson on the importance of Harris’s ethics and values led off the document. The leadership along with the rank-and-file employees of Harris & Associates took no little pride in this collective effort. The ethics and values heritage of Harris & Associates certainly seemed to be well-defined and articulated. Now, it seemed, there could be no excuses on the part of new or old, near or distant, Harris people, when it came to the ethics and values at the heart of the Harris Way. It was easily available in writing, in a clear and understandable language. “All of us on the executive leadership team at Harris were satisfied, even delighted, not just by our product but by the process we had followed,” said Guy Erickson. “We were really amazed,” Vern added, “when a business strategy consulting group did a survey of all our Harris employees in 2006 and the “Harris Way” was cited as the strongest asset of our company by about 80% of our people, more than double whatever was in second place.”

“You can’t hold people accountable if you don’t make clear what they are accountable for,” Vern commented. “That is part of how the Harris Way helps us run the company.” “Of course,” Guy added, “now that we have stated these values and standards the employees are free to hold us managers and leaders accountable for them also!”

But is it enough to identify and put in writing an organization’s mission, vision, core values, and ethical guidelines? Can management assume that all employees will read, remember, and understand the content of the 23-page Harris Way? Can management assume that all Harris people --- from the board members down to the newest hire --- will apply and live by the company’s stated values and guidelines? To ask such questions was to answer them. Nothing should be taken for granted by Harris management.

Guy Erickson and his executive leadership faced a challenge in January 2006 every bit as important as those of 2004 and 2005. Now the challenge was to design a program (a) to communicate the content of the company mission, vision, core values, and ethical guidelines to everyone in the company and (b) to understand the meaning, nuance, and application of the Harris Way to specific concrete circumstances.

- Who were the audiences? Can or should they be segmented --- or kept together and treated as a whole?
- What should be communicated? How often?

- What are the appropriate channels, techniques, and procedures for communicating and learning the ethics and values?
- Who will be charged with ultimate responsibility and oversight for ethics and values communication and training at Harris?
- What is the role of executive leadership and of management in Harris's ethics and values concerns?
- What ethics and values responsibilities should fall to all employees?
- Should Harris continue to utilize the services of an ethics consultant and, if so, how?

Harris had made a major stride forward in carefully articulating its values and ethics but it would all be a waste of time if they did not make the right moves going forward on the communication, training, and implementation tasks.

Exhibit A: The Harris Way

The Harris Way Mission, Vision, Core Values, & Ethical Guidelines

1 January 2006

Harris & Associates

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Preface: Our Ethics

by Carl Harris
Founder & Chairman of the Board

Our company ethics and values are very important to me, as I hope they are to you. Over the past 31 plus years I have witnessed the evolution of our ethics. Until now, we never had a document capturing what our ethics are. We relied on examples of individuals and word-of-mouth. This worked okay when we were a smaller company, but today, with many new employees joining each year, it is important to instill our ethics as quickly as possible. Our new Ethical Guidelines will help this process.

To me, the bottom rung on the ethics ladder is “what is legal.” We want to continue to move higher on the ethics scale by striving to do “what’s right.” Our ethics are lofty, something we always try to achieve. The best measure of our company is not how much money we make, but what we stand for. Good ethics also makes good business. We are in the business of serving our clients, staff, and communities for the long haul. Adhering to strong ethical principles will insure our company’s long term success.

I am very proud of our current ethical values and am proud of how we are perceived by our clients and peers. I definitely want this to continue as my legacy.

Please take time to read, understand, and embrace our Mission, Vision, and Core Values and Ethical Guidelines. This is a work in process, a living document, so your comments and suggestions are always welcome to help us make this document more meaningful and current through the coming years.

1. Ethics & Values Matter

by Guy Erickson
President, Harris & Associates

Ethics and values *matter* deeply and profoundly at Harris & Associates. Our success as a company for more than thirty years is not just because of a favorable economy, smart people, and a lot of hard work. As Carl Harris and any other veteran of our company will tell you, our core values and high ethics are at the heart of all the success we have experienced.

A lot of companies have gotten into very serious trouble in recent years by ignoring or losing sight of their ethics and values. A great historic American accounting firm was destroyed, and disappeared almost overnight, when it forgot the values and ethics that made it great. It became terribly compromised by unethical dealings with other companies. It can happen in any industry, including our own. Thirty years of success are no guarantee of the future if we forget the values and ethics that got us here.

It’s not rocket science - just common sense.

- If we are unethical with our clients - we lose their trust, their respect, and their business.
- If we are unethical with our business partners - they will avoid working with us.
- If we are unethical with each other in the Harris “family” - we become dysfunctional.

But even this common sense business case for ethics and values doesn’t get to the true heart of the matter. For Harris, ethics and values are not just about preventing bad things from happening. Our ethics and values form our fundamental corporate “DNA” - they are the core characteristics of who we are, not just some rules about what *not* to do. Ethics is about achieving excellence and success, about taking pride not just in “what we do” but in “how we do the things we do.” If we are unethical with ourselves – we destroy a part of our being.

As our company grows toward five hundred employees . . . as we branch out throughout the Western United States . . . and as our founding generation of company leaders moves toward retirement . . . we have called upon everyone in our company to help identify our historic core - our central mission, vision, values, and ethical guidelines. Ethics and values are everybody's business at Harris. What you see in this document is the product of more than three hundred voices of Harris people.

Our calling as a company is to live out these values and ethics from day to day - to be familiar with our guidelines, apply them in our decision-making and actions, and pass them along to our colleagues and business partners. This is a living document that will be regularly reviewed, revised, and improved based on your input. Help us make it count in our business experience at Harris. Help us make it better.

2. Our Mission & Vision

The Harris Mission is a statement of our core purpose. It is a brief summary of why we exist. It is the unifying theme in all the projects we undertake. The mission is our "guiding star." It is our ultimate "boss." Every task and every project at Harris should contribute to this basic, core purpose.

The Harris Mission

Helping clients, employees, and communities succeed through industry-leading management and consulting services.

- We serve our clients as their partner and advocate, bringing our expertise and dedication to their projects from start to successful finish.
- We provide our employees with opportunities for creativity, growth, and career success in a supportive, fun, and rewarding team environment.
- We protect and improve our community and environment through responsible stewardship of our shared resources.

* * * * *

The Harris Vision is a description of what we want to be---and will be---if we carry out our core mission successfully. This is how we see our company and our future. This is how we want to be seen by others.

The Harris Vision

The excellence and integrity leader among management and consulting companies.

The Harris Vision is to be not the biggest but the best in our regions of operation. We want to continue to grow our company in a sustainable manner that does not compromise our core mission and values or the health of our company culture.

- We want to be the first choice of clients seeking management and consulting services, with a reputation for exceptional ethics, expertise, and client focus.
- We want to continue to attract and retain great people at Harris & Associates, drawn by our reputation for innovation, opportunity, and a fun and satisfying work environment.
- We want to be valued as model corporate citizens by all the communities in which we operate, with a reputation for generosity, responsiveness, and wise stewardship.

3. Our Core Values

Our core values are the six essential characteristics we want to have embedded in every part of Harris & Associates. Our experience of more than three decades as a company has demonstrated that our excellence and success depend on these six key traits. Every project, every region, every policy, every decision, and every employee is expected to be guided by these values while working at Harris.

Harris Values

In carrying out our mission and pursuing our vision, we are shaped and guided by six core values:

Integrity: “doing the right thing”

We are about honesty, fairness, and responsibility, about consistently living out our values and principles with uncompromising integrity and ethics.

Quality: “doing things right”

We have a passion for excellence and high standards, for industry-leading innovation, expertise, and effective performance.

Reliability: “you can count on us”

We do what we say---and we stand behind what we do---with accountability, responsiveness, and follow-through, from project start to project finish.

Respect: “everyone is important”

We value and respect every member of our team---whatever their role---and each of our clients, business partners, and communities.

Teamwork: “working better together”

We team with each other and our clients to meet challenges and then share the success. It’s about collaboration, approachability, good listening, and sharing ideas.

Fun: “more than just a job”

We enjoy our work and our fellow workers, experiencing personal freedom, creativity, and growth in a “family” atmosphere of mutual support and celebration.

4. Our Ethical Guidelines

4.1 Introduction

Our mission and vision describe *where* we are going as a company. Our core values describe *who* we are, the kind of organization we are building. Our ethical guidelines describe “*how* we do the things we do.” Every Harris employee is expected to be familiar with these guidelines and comply with their provisions. Ethics at Harris is everybody’s business. It is the responsibility of every employee to carry out their own work in an ethical manner, to report any questions or possible violations, and to suggest ways of improving this code and, more generally, the ethical health of our company.

4.2 General Principles and Guidelines

In addition to the more specific ethical guidelines which follow below (section 4.3) the following twelve general principles guide ethics at Harris, in all of our relations with clients, business partners, fellow employees, or anyone else. These guidelines supplement the policies and procedures outlined in the Harris Personnel Policies Manual.

- **Never knowingly do harm.**
 - *Follow this basic, historic, first rule of professional ethics at all times.*
- **Comply with applicable laws and regulations.**
 - *Observe the legal ground rules of our society and marketplace (e.g., concerning copyright, building codes, environmental impact, taxes, etc.) at all times.*
 - *Never compromise or violate a law even if a client or business partner asks for it and says they will take responsibility for it.*
- **Comply with relevant codes of professional ethics.**
 - *Observe the standard ethical guidelines espoused by professionals working in our vocational and business areas (e.g., the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Construction Management Association of America).*
- **Treat others as we would want to be treated, with honesty, fairness, dignity, and respect.**
 - *Use the classic “Golden Rule” as one helpful guide in figuring out the right thing to do.*
 - *If in any doubt, ask some colleagues how they would want to be treated in a given situation.*
- **Protect life, health, and safety.**
 - *Rectify or report immediately any unsafe or threatening situations.*
 - *Accept responsibility for any unsafe conditions we may have caused or contributed to and take corrective action.*
 - *Pursue the highest standards in safety, whether on Harris property, in transit, or at a project site,*
 - *Never compromise safety at any stage from project design, to execution, to final inspection.*
- **Fulfill commitments, contracts, agreements, and promises.**
 - *Follow through completely and reliably on agreements made with clients, business partners, and fellow employees.*
 - *Make any changes in such commitments only by mutual agreement and in a transparent, above-board, manner.*
- **Maintain fairness in business and financial matters.**
 - *Avoid both the appearance and the reality of any kind of financial or business impropriety.*
 - *Deliver the full value service that has been purchased from Harris.*
 - *Compensate employees, sub-consultants, and business partners fairly for services rendered.*
 - *Ensure that invoicing and billing practices are accurate and fully justified, whether dealing with clients, business partners, or personal expense reimbursements.*
 - *Avoid real or potential conflicts of interest that could arise from giving or receiving gifts, dealing with relatives or close friends, or from any other source.*
 - *Avoid improper tampering with the employees, operations, inside information, or intellectual property of other companies.*
- **Never compromise on truthfulness and accuracy.**
 - *Maintain clarity, consistency, and accuracy in all communications with clients, contractors, business partners, employees, governmental agencies, and the public.*
 - *Never submit deceptive, incomplete, or inaccurate proposals, financial reports, or inspections.*
 - *Do not over-promise on schedules, project outcomes, or personnel; disclose any contingencies and concerns.*
 - *Correct mistakes, misstatements, and misleading communications immediately.*
- **Respect privacy and protect confidential and proprietary information.**
 - *Protect the privacy of individuals and their records, whether Harris employees or not.*

- *Protect the confidentiality of the proprietary information, business plans, and communications of Harris and its clients and business partners.*
- *Do not accept or misappropriate any confidential information or proprietary data from a competitor company; respect always the rights of the rightful owners of information.*
- **Maintain respectful and professional relationships.**
 - *Communicate (voice, written, e-mail, or otherwise) in a respectful and professional manner to fellow workers, clients, partners, contractors, competitors, and all others.*
 - *Maintain a professional and inoffensive personal appearance and work environment*
 - *Avoid behavior or communication that could come across as disrespect, harassment, or a lack of courtesy or professionalism.*
- **Be open to criticism, admit mistakes, take responsibility, and take corrective action.**
 - *Take the initiative to improve your own performance.*
 - *Do not hide from criticism, evade responsibility, or try to pass the buck.*
- **Address questions, criticisms, and admonitions directly and privately with the persons involved.**
 - *Take the initiative to address issues with others as soon as possible.*
 - *Do not go behind people's backs with complaints.*
 - *Do not risk humiliating people in front of others.*

4.3 Specific Guidelines

4.3.1 Clients

- **Developing Business**
 - *Market our services and develop our business by telling the truth, the facts about Harris experience, expertise, and client service.*
 - *Build positive relationships with potential clients and demonstrate our collaborative style and orientation.*
 - *Never engage in, or respond to, manipulative, unprofessional, or unethical business development tactics.*
- **Working With Clients**
 - *Provide loyal and competent representation of the client at all times during the contract.*
 - *Inform clients fully and clearly about the risks, options, and possible ramifications of choices; provide fair and objective advice to enable sound client decisions.*
 - *Protect the client's budget and best interests.*

4.3.2 Contractors and Business Partners

- **Choosing Business Partners**
 - *Choose business partners based on their qualifications and availability, and on client needs.*
 - *Maintain openness, transparency, and objectivity in determining business partnerships.*
- **Working with Contractors and Business Partners**
 - *Partner with contractors to deliver excellent results to clients.*
 - *Maintain open, honest, and adequate communications with contractors and other business partners.*
 - *Encourage and facilitate open communication among clients, contractors, business partners, and managers with full disclosure of relevant developments, challenges, problems, and opportunities.*
 - *Provide competent information and advice to clients on contractor issues and concerns.*

- *Never agree to any work that is substandard, out of compliance with codes and regulations, or cuts corners to save money or time.*
- *Ensure that inspections are carried out in an objective, competent, transparent manner.*

4.3.3 Employees

- **Employee Recruiting & Hiring**
 - *Recruit employees by honestly and effectively communicating the facts, opportunities, and benefits of employment at Harris.*
 - *Seek a workforce characterized by a rich diversity in terms of age, experience, gender, ethnicity, and cultural background.*
 - *Seek prospective employees whose values and purposes are in alignment with the mission, vision, and core values of Harris.*
 - *Refer interested individuals to the Harris web site and to our Human Resources department. Do not engage in “raiding” of employees of other firms.*
- **Working for Harris**
 - *Treat all fellow employees with integrity, dignity, respect, and care, valuing everyone’s role on the Harris team.*
 - *Carry out individual assignments with competence, diligence, and pride.*
 - *Build teamwork and healthy, open, honest communication.*
 - *Contribute to the fun and family atmosphere at Harris but do not violate basic norms of professional behavior.*
 - *Use company equipment, resources, and assets appropriately and responsibly.*
 - *Refrain from behavior away from work which could create a conflict of interest, tarnish the reputation of the company, or affect your ability to carry out your job at Harris.*

5. What to do if you have an ethics question---or need to report a possible violation

Step #1: Reflection: Is your concern important enough to take any action?

If you become aware of a possible ethics issue in our company (or on the part of a client or business partner we are working with), here are five test questions to help you determine if you should take action. If the answer is “Yes” to one or more of these five test questions, you should take action and make an inquiry or report. *It may not turn out to be a serious problem---but it is important to take action to find out.*

1. Is it illegal?

Any time you see something that might be breaking a legal or regulatory standard, report it.

2. Does it violate our company values and ethical guidelines?

Any time something may be in contradiction to one of our core values or in violation of one of our ethical guidelines (or of a relevant professional ethical guideline, e.g., the code for civil engineers), report it.

3. Does it violate the Golden Rule or your internal sense of right and wrong?

If you wouldn’t want it done to you, we probably shouldn’t do it to others. If it really bothers your personal conscience and values, it probably would bother others. Report it.

4. Would we be doing this if it was the lead story in the news?

Individuals and companies doing wrong things usually try to hide what they are doing. If you wouldn’t feel good about having the public know and see what we are doing, report it.

5. Could someone be seriously and irresponsibly harmed?

This is a bottom line question in ethics. If anyone could be seriously and irresponsibly harmed (physically, financially, reputationally, etc.), report it.

Step #2: Action: *How should I report a question or possible violation?*

If possible, start with the first three steps (below) to report and resolve ethical questions and challenges. If these steps seem dangerous, unwise, or unproductive, or you are not satisfied after pursuing them, move to any of the final three steps:

1. Speak to the offender(s).

It is not always possible to take your concerns to the (apparent) offender doing an unethical act. When possible, however, this is the place to begin.

2. Ask a trusted colleague for advice or help.

Sometimes ethical questions can be answered and problems resolved by simply discussing the matter with a colleague or two.

3. Report it to your supervisor.

Your supervisor is responsible for ethical as well as business matters. Unless the ethics question concerns your supervisor personally, or you remain unsatisfied by your supervisor's response, you should take the matter to him or her.

4. Report it to any supervisor or manager with whom you feel comfortable.

All managers and supervisors at Harris are available to all employees for ethics matters.

5. Report it to the Human Resources Manager.

The Human Resources Manager will always be available to provide help with your ethics questions and reports.

6. Report it to the President.

The President of Harris & Associates always has an open door for anyone who wishes to raise a question or make a report on any ethical matter.

You may submit your question or report anonymously by letter if you feel it necessary.

6. What happens to your ethics questions and reports?

- All ethics questions and reports of possible violations are taken very seriously by the company.
- There will be no retaliation for raising ethical questions or reporting possible violations; it is the obligation of every employee to report any violations and to protect the ethical health of the company
- If your question or report is not anonymous and is submitted to a supervisor or manager (including the HR Manager and President), it will be acknowledged in an appropriate and timely manner.
- If the issue can be resolved by the supervisor receiving the question or report, it will be addressed and resolved as quickly as possible and you will be informed of the decision and action.
- If the issue cannot be resolved quickly, easily, or satisfactorily by that supervisor, you may be contacted for further discussion of the specific issue; the supervisor will consult with others on the management team, taking it as far as the President and Board of Directors, if necessary, until a satisfactory resolution can be found.
- A decision will be made by management, subject always to the approval of the Board, and corrective action will be taken to address the specific situation and those involved in it--and to reinforce or improve the policies, standards, and procedures of the company so as to minimize the possibility of such problems recurring.
- Unless the report was submitted anonymously, the reporting individual will receive a report on the company's resolution of the issue.

Exhibit B: Core Cultural Values Worksheet

Harris & Associates Core Values Worksheet

26 August 2005

In order to carry out its mission with excellence . . . in order to pursue and achieve its vision . . . what are the four or six or eight core (central, defining) characteristics/traits that must be embedded in every part of the organization, every geographic area, every person hired, every project, every policy? What have been our defining characteristics and values up to now, that have helped us become what we are? What are the most important characteristics to have in the people we hire?

First, take about five minutes to circle any of the values listed below that seem to be of core importance for Harris & Associates as you know the company.

Second, compare your choices with those of the others in your breakout group and then come up with a "top four" Harris core values list you can all agree on.

integrity	fairness, justice	ethics
trust, trustworthy	honesty	openness
passion, dedication	commitment	loyalty
client-focused	reliability, dependability	excellence
responsiveness	effectiveness, efficiency	creativity
freedom	innovation	growth
opportunity	entrepreneurship	teamwork
mutual respect	open communication	listening
valuing everyone	fun, happiness	approachable
caring, empathy	casual, informal	family
stability	environmental concern	stewardship
diversity	courage	persistence
wisdom	flexibility	quality
collaboration	excitement	learning
service	generosity	security
profitability	originality	adventure
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Our Top Four List of Harris & Associates Values:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |

1. What are the basic tasks that make up your job? (name them briefly)
2. On each of those tasks you have listed, what written guidelines should we give to help new employees avoid doing the wrong thing---and know clearly how to do the right thing? (jot them down)
3. In your work activities and practices at Harris, what are the most frequent---or most dangerous---challenges to our ethics and integrity that might arise? Where could we get into ethical trouble?
4. Especially for the sake of a new Harris employee in your work area, how could we state our ethical guideline(s) for staying out of trouble with regard to the problem(s) you mention in the preceding answer?
5. As you think about what Harris stands for (its mission, vision, and values, its heritage and legacy), what do you see as some of the most important guidelines for employee conduct that should be articulated in the Harris Code of Ethics---both in general and as it concerns your work area in the company? ("Always do" or "Never" or "When doing x, always do y" etc.)

Instructor's Manual
for
ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS AT HARRIS & ASSOCIATES:
DEFINING & PRESERVING A HERITAGE

by
 David W. Gill
 St. Mary's College, Moraga CA

Case Summary

"Organizational Ethics at Harris & Associates: Defining and Preserving A Heritage" describes how a thirty-year old construction and project management firm went about creating a statement of its mission, vision, core values, and ethical standards. The case writer was the organizational ethics consultant chosen by Harris & Associates (www.harris-assoc.com). As such the case represents an inside and intimate knowledge of the five month project from conception to completion in late 2005.

Engineer Carl Harris and two colleagues founded Harris & Associates (www.harris-assoc.com) in Lafayette, California, in 1974. Over the next three decades Harris & Associates established a reputation for reliable, high quality civil design and project and construction management services, specializing in public works projects such as water and wastewater treatment plants, hospitals, schools, roads and highways. The company grew from its original three employees to a workforce of some 400 by the early 2000s. Most employees continued to work out of the Concord headquarters in northern California but with a strong southern California branch office and several smaller regional offices west of the Rockies. Throughout this period of growth, Harris & Associates was a privately-held corporation owned and operated by its shareholders (composed of Harris & Associate employees who purchased stock in their company) through its elected Board of Directors.

By 2004, the increased size of the company and the dispersion of its staff into offices throughout the western United States created new challenges for the maintenance of Harris's long-standing mission, ethics, and values --- which, by all accounts, had been a distinct competitive strength --- throughout the organization. Furthermore, founder Carl Harris was in the process of retiring from day-to-day involvement in company leadership and long-time leaders such as Guy Erickson (President), Jim Parmley (VP) and Neil McCosker (VP) were beginning to plan for their own retirements. In the context of such growth, dispersion, and major leadership transition, how best could the company define and preserve its strong values and ethics and minimize future risks of the sort of ethical misconduct that seemed to plague more and more of its competitors?

Teaching Objectives, Target Audience, & Teaching Strategy

The Harris & Associates case is appropriate for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses in business ethics and organizational development. By working through the Harris & Associates case, current and future managers will wrestle with the options and choices necessarily made in the course of developing an appropriate and effective ethics and values statement for an organization. How broadly or narrowly should the project be construed? Should the organization develop its own program internally or rely on an outside vendor? How might outside consultants relate to the organization's own leadership and staff? How might the process mobilize the expertise and gain the ownership of the organization's employees?

The following section of this Instructor's Manual walks through the case section by section, raising discussion questions, providing some possible answers (in italics), and suggesting collateral assignments intended to deepen the reader's knowledge base, stimulate critical thinking and collaborative discussion, and add to the reader's "takeaway" ideas, tools, and strategies for their ethics management "toolbox." The case culminates in questions about how to communicate and implement the newly crafted statement of ethics and values to all segments of the company. Students are challenged to design an ethics communication, training and implementation program for Harris & Associates.

Case Analysis, Questions, & Answers

Introduction

The Introduction describes the factors that caused the leaders of Harris & Associates to take a serious look at their company ethics and values.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What were the reasons Carl Harris and his leadership team became so interested in taking a look at their company's ethics and values in 2004?**
 - *too many employees to continue relying on personal relationships and mentoring alone;*
 - *too much geographical dispersion to maintain close, ongoing, mentoring relationships;*
 - *upcoming major leadership transitions at top of company;*
 - *how to maintain company ethics and values in a time of great change?*
2. **What might be some other good reasons for organizations to review and strengthen their ethics programs?**
 - *competitive pressures to cut corners; increased risk and temptation in industry;*
 - *possible decline of honesty, ethics, and character in today's culture;*
 - *bad ethics can lead to damaged reputation, legal troubles, employee problems, etc.*
3. **Are there any good arguments *against* investing company time and resources in pursuit of good ethics --- or social/environmental responsibility?**
 - *can ethics programs change peoples' character? – just hire carefully, fire the bad apples?*
 - *is ethics just a distracting luxury? comply with laws but stay focused on financial bottom line?*

Learning Activities:

- (A) Ask each student to find and briefly interview a veteran business manager on the topic “As a manager, do you believe a strong ethics program and emphasis is important? Why or why not?” Ask them to take a few basic notes and report in class on what they heard.
- (B) Ask students to review the business news from the past week and bring in an example of good ethics helping --- or bad ethics hurting --- a company or business leader.
- (C) Ask each student to write a brief “Memo to the CEO (or Chair of Board)” on “Why Our Company Should Pursue Sound Ethics and Values.”
- (D) In teams, or as a whole group, build a collaborative, consensus list of arguments on “why ethics is important in organizations today.” Think of it as a collaborative “Wikipedia” entry.

Company Background

This section describes the history, basic business, growth, and leadership of Harris & Associates.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What kind of business (service delivered, client base, etc.) was Harris & Associates in?**
 - *public works projects serving cities, counties, public agencies;*
 - *engineering consulting, construction and project management*
2. **Harris & Associates was one generation old. Should a much younger --- or much older --- organization approach ethics differently? How and why?**
 - *don't needlessly bury small, young organizations in rules—but provide adequate guidance;*
 - *need to revise, improve, keep existing ethics statements fresh and current; never too late?*
3. **Harris & Associates was a privately-held corporation. Would their ethics challenges and opportunities have been any different if they were publically-traded?**
 - *does being privately-held put less pressure on shareholder demand for an ROI focus?*

Learning Activities:

- (A) Visit the web to take a look at what kind of ethics and values young (less than 10 years) --- and old (more than 40 years) companies post at their web sites.

Ethics Project and Process Decisions

This section poses questions of how exactly to proceed on the ethics and values project: outsource to a big vendor, try to do it in-house, or something else?

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What are possible advantages and disadvantages of creating company ethics and values**
 - (a) entirely in-house, using existing staff, relying on published guidebooks,
 - (b) outsourcing to a major consulting firm, or
 - (c) utilizing a smaller, local consulting resource?
 - (a) (+) *financial savings in short-term at least; customization; strong ownership; (-) limited expertise, possible lack of project focus as other responsibilities compete*
 - (b) (+) *experience and reputation; (-) lack of ownership; high cost; one-size-fits-all?;*
 - (c) (+) *customization; local follow-through; cost savings? (-) adequacy of resources and experience?*
2. **What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of**
 - (a) limiting the project to a basic code of ethics or
 - (b) creating the code of ethics within the broader texture of mission, vision, and the core values of the company culture?
 - (a) (+) *cheaper, faster, more direct; (-) code lacks cultural muscle and integration into firm;*
 - (b) (+) *intends to build a strong mission and culture behind code; longer term prospects of increased success; (-) requires more time, bigger commitment initially and long-term*

Learning Activities:

- (A) Ask half of the students to contact ethics and values consulting firms (visit web sites, follow up phone calls, interviews, or e-mails) to inquire about estimated costs, timeframes, and processes for assisting a 30-year old firm of 400 employees in creating its first ethics and values statement. Share findings in class.
- (B) Ask half of the students to contact companies approximately 30 years old with 400 or so employees to inquire how they created their company ethics and values statements and ask for their advice and counsel on such a project. Share findings in class.

First: Get the Mission Straight

This section describes how Harris & Associates opted to take a holistic organizational approach to ethics and values and began by clarifying the corporate mission and vision.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What did Harris & Associates figure out as its company mission?**
 - *helping clients, employees, and communities succeed through industry-leading management and consulting services*
2. **How are “mission” and “vision” defined and differentiated?**
 - *mission: a brief summary of the service or product we deliver, the change we make in our customers' worlds, in light of which they pay us;*
 - *vision: how we would like our company to be seen as we fulfill our mission and become the company we dream of*
3. **Who are the best creators, champions, and guardians of a company mission and vision? Why?**
 - *those who have a viewpoint taking in the whole company and who have responsibility and authority over the company as a whole, i.e., top executives and directors;*
 - *the mission and vision describe the unifying purpose to be shared by everyone in the company*
4. **What is the relationship between a company's mission and vision --- and its ethics and values?**
 - *mission and vision motivate ethics in that they are the goal and reward for which the company strives and for the sake of which we discipline our behavior;*

- *mission and vision also specify or imply the actual content of the ethical values and standards; ethics can be thought of as an account of how we need to treat each other and our stakeholders in order to achieve a particular mission*

Learning Activities:

- Ask each student to visit the web site of a company to see if its ethics and values statement is or appears to be related in any conscious way to the company mission and vision. Share findings in class.
- Ask students to find examples in history or literature of individuals or groups whose behavior changed radically as a result of a change in mission, vision, purpose, or life goals. Share and discuss findings in class.
- Ask students to write down either
 - a personal career mission and vision followed by a description of behavior required to succeed or excel in achieving those goals or
 - a proposed company mission or vision followed by a description of behavior required to succeed or excel in achieving those goals

Second: Identify Core Values to Embed in the Corporate Culture

This section describes the process by which Harris & Associates drew upon the insight and experience of its top seventy or so managers to get clear on the core values that had been, and needed to be, embedded in all levels of the company culture to enable achievement of the mission and vision with sound ethics.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

- What is “corporate culture” and how does it relate to mission and vision, and to ethics and values?**
 - *culture is the overall corporate “character” of an organization --- its infrastructure, systems, policies, personnel, traditions, and atmosphere, its habits, capabilities, and inclinations;*
 - *culture either enables and rewards --- or it impedes --- achievement of the mission and vision and fulfillment of company ethical standards*
- Who are the creators, guardians, and tenders of a company’s culture?**
 - *all managers with responsibilities for teams, departments, or branch offices are the de facto culture creators and tenders and therefore must play central roles in articulating and embedding the company’s core values in their micro-cultures*
- How did Harris & Associates go about determining the core values of their culture?**
 - *a management retreat utilized a one-page core values worksheet for individuals, with small and large group discussion, followed by back-and-forth iteration of the core values summary until all managers were satisfied that it was authentic and representative of the company culture and clearly, logically aligned with the mission and vision of the company*

Learning Activities:

- Ask students to search the web for definitions of “corporate culture” and “core values” and bring their findings to class for discussion.
- Ask each student to visit a company web site to see if the company’s core values appear to be related in any conscious way to either its mission and vision or its code of ethics or conduct. Share findings in class.
- Ask each student to interview a veteran manager on the questions: “How would you define corporate culture?” and “Can you comment on how culture relates (or not) to ethical compliance and performance?” Share findings in class.

Third: Create A Helpful, Expert Code of Ethical Guidelines

This section describes how Harris & Associates mobilized its entire workforce to write its code of ethics.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What is the purpose of a company code of ethics (or conduct)? What factors might make a code strong or weak?**
 - a code of ethics (or “standards of business conduct”) provides guidelines for business and workplace decisions and actions; ethics codes go beyond the minimum requirements of laws and regulations to set standards for how the company carries out its business practices
 - strong, helpful codes of ethics are comprehensive enough to guide all significant areas of business practice and all known significant ethical challenges that might arise in that business; they are simple and articulate enough to be practical and useful; they are positive in tone, not just a list of negative boundaries and prohibitions; they are kept current and up-to-date with periodic revisions; they are “owned” by the people governed by them.
 - weak codes are haphazard and incomplete, often limited only to areas where potential or actual legal troubles occur; they are created and imposed from outside the practitioners who will be governed by them; they are dry and boring; they are disconnected from the company mission, vision, and core values.
2. **What are the arguments for and against having employees write the code of ethics for their area of business practice? How else could a company ethics code be written --- and what would be the advantages and disadvantages?**
 - For: employees bring expertise (no one knows the work specialty, its opportunities and challenges, better than the practitioner) and then have ownership and “buy-in” when they write it --- two great advantages over any externally generated code of ethics imposed on the employees; wiki platforms (e.g., Wikipedia) show the power and potential of mass collaborative projects like this;
 - Against: employees could sabotage such a project or resist writing guidelines for company leaders to enforce on them; could take more time and money to involve the workforce.
 - Alternatives: hire an outside consultant or assign an inside company manager (attorney, HR director, et al) to write a code; could be fast, efficient, inexpensive --- but could be dull and generic, legalistic, miss the practicality and expertise of the practitioners, and be disrespected and disregarded by workforce who see it as a management imposition and lack of trust.
3. **How was the content of the Harris & Associates Code of Ethics organized? What are the possibly risks and rewards in their “Harris Way” approach?**
 - the code is located in the context of the larger “Harris Way” --- an introductory statement from the CEO on the importance of good ethics and values, followed by the mission and vision, the core values, then the code of ethics, and finally some guidelines on how to raise questions or report possible violations. The code of ethics itself begins with twelve general guidelines applying to everyone at all times in the company. This is followed by three sections providing guidelines for relationships (a) with clients, (b) with business partners, and (c) with fellow Harris employees.
 - the intent of the Harris Way content organization is to keep the ethical guidance integrally linked to the larger mission and vision and culture of the company; the risk is that the total presentation could feel overwhelming and complicated to some employees.

Learning Activities:

- (A) Ask each student to bring in a Code of Ethics (“Standards for Business Conduct,” etc.) from a current or former employer and describe (i) its authorship origins, (ii) how adequate (“expert,” complete) it was as a set of guidelines for behavior in the company, and (iii) how employees viewed the code.

Fourth: Outline A Reporting and Trouble Shooting Process for Ethical Problems

This section describes the process Harris advised for raising and resolving ethics questions and reports of violations.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **What is the value of companies spelling out a process for employees to recognize and report on ethics questions and problems?**

- *Clarity of process, speed of response, and company-wide understanding are benefits.*
- 2. **What are the possible benefits and dangers of advising employees to try first to “speak to the offender(s)”?**
 - *(+) resolve problems at lowest possible level, earliest opportunity; can create trust and good communication; offenders generally prefer to be treated like adults and held responsible; offenders who acknowledge own problems may learn, gain respect, salvage careers; (-) offender may retaliate; questioner may remain silent, intimidated; problem may be unresolved*

Learning Activities:

- (A) Ask each student to research a company to find out what advice they give, and what channels they have created, for employees to raise questions and report ethics problems. If possible, ask someone at the company how effective these channels have been and what their benefits and drawbacks have been. Share insights in class.

Communicate, Train, Implement

The case concludes by pointing forward. Following its five month project to articulate its mission, vision, core values, and ethical guidelines, the work of communicating, training, and implementing ethics and values began in earnest at Harris & Associates.

Discussion Questions (& Answers):

1. **Why isn't it enough for a company to create a set of values and ethics standards and deliver a copy to each employee --- perhaps requiring annually a signature affirming compliance with the standards?**
 - *the message is “this is just a formality, not very important”*
 - *most business today occurs in high speed, high pressure, competitive circumstances leaving little time or inclination for careful ethical reflection*
 - *lacking regular, careful training in company values and ethics, employees default to “what everybody else is doing” or “what we can get away with” or “what we used to do where I worked.”*
2. **Why is it that some companies with what seemed like solid ethics and values standards (e.g., Enron, Arthur Andersen, AIG, HealthSouth, Merck) nevertheless found themselves in serious ethical and legal as well as business difficulty?**
 - *ethics and values must not simply be adopted but communicated, implemented, and audited in a systematic, thorough way*
 - *all populations in a company, including boards of directors and top executives, and outside business partners, upstream and downstream, need to be carefully oriented to company values and ethics; many of the business scandals were centered in leadership that acted as though it was above the law and ethics.*
3. **What is involved in effectively (a) communicating and teaching company ethics and standards, and (b) implementing company values and standards (“walking the talk”)?**
 - *mission, vision, core values, and ethical guidelines must be communicated regularly and frequently through multiple media and channels: executive and management speeches and presentations, posters and tschotskes (coffee cups, mouse pads, etc.), company newsletters, web site content, and so on*
 - *all segments of the company need at least annual ethics and values training, including some face-to-face discussion and training as well as online training programs*
 - *management must focus regular attention on identifying and inventing positive, concrete, and specific ways of exhibiting for all to see and experience the mission and each of the company's core values in all aspects of the company culture. Conversely, all misalignments must be eliminated and any personnel who resist company ethics and values must be converted or dismissed.*
 - *management must sanction violations of company ethics and values when they occur --- and continually look for positive ethical behavior in the company to praise and reward.*

Learning Activities:

- (A) Ask students to report on their own business ethics experiences – or on information from the web or from interviews of business managers – on what makes for effective communication, training, and implementation of ethics values and standards.
- (B) Working as individuals or in small teams, have students create a proposal for a comprehensive three-year ethics and values communication, training, and implementation program for Harris & Associates, based simply on information about the company and its ethics and values provided in this case, and drawing on research (web searches, interviews, work experiences, literature, etc.) into other organizational ethics and values programs.

References & Resources

1. Books

- Jeffrey Abrahams, *The Mission Statement Book: 301 Corporate Mission Statements from America's Top Companies* (Ten Speed Press, 1995). For what it's worth, under one cover. Surfing the web sites of companies will get you the same or better information and examples.
- Kenneth Blanchard & Michael O'Connor, *Managing By Values* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1997). A brief story-based presentation of the missional and cultural foundations essential to sound ethics in organizations.
- Richard R. Ellsworth, *Leading with Purpose: The New Corporate Realities* (Stanford, 2002). The argument for mission and purpose as the foundation of business culture and practice.
- David W. Gill, *It's About Excellence: Building Ethically-Healthy Organizations* (Provo: Executive Excellence Publishing, 2008). A manual for managers and textbook for MBA students.
- Nikos Mourkogiannis, *Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). A compelling argument for the importance of getting the right mission and purpose in place.
- Patrick E. Murphy, *Eighty Exemplary Ethics Statements* (University of Notre Dame, 1998). Like the Abrahams collection of mission statements listed above, provides some good examples of the holistic approach followed by Harris & Associates
- Linda K. Trevino & Katherine A. Nelson, *Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk About How to Do It Right* (John Wiley, 4th ed., 2006). Among the comprehensive business ethics textbooks this is the best, most practical, and comprehensive. Some practical management advice is included along with outstanding theoretical discussions.
- Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (Jossey-Bass, 3rd ed., 2004). Certainly one of the most important and thorough studies of corporate culture.
- Robert C. Solomon, *Ethics & Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in Business* (Oxford University Press, 1993). The late Robert Solomon was the leading proponent of a more holistic, culture-emphasizing, Aristotelian approach to organizational ethics. This is one of his fullest and best expositions of the approach.

2. Web Sites

Business.com www.business.com

Business.com is a major web site ("The Business Search Engine") for anyone seeking links to information on almost any topic in business today. The sub-section on business ethics (in the management section) is a large and valuable catalog of organizational web sites, some offering sample codes of ethics or ethics consulting and education services, some linking you to university centers and professional associations focused on business ethics. A line or two of description is given for each link but no evaluation or rating helps a first-timer to know which sites are better or worse, more or less reliable, etc.. Still, this is a very helpful site.

Ethics & Compliance Officers Association www.theecoa.org

Ecoa.org is the web site of the Massachusetts-based Ethics and Compliance Officers Association, founded in 1992. The ECOA, with about a thousand members, is the leading organization of corporate ethics and compliance officers, with a significant and growing presence among Fortune 100 companies. Based on the ECOA's own reports at their web site, their ethics officers have many more lawyers among them than people trained in ethics. One of the ECOA's current major projects is to develop a

comprehensive Business Conduct Management Standard by which compliance can be measured. This “damage control ethics” is now being augmented by more holistic approaches as the ECOA expands its contacts and partnerships beyond the legal departments to include individuals and organizations trained in ethics. ECOA membership is open to individuals and to organizations for a substantial annual fee. The ECOA sponsors various conferences and courses for ethics officers. The web site makes some interesting information available to non-member visitors but it is on the whole rather meager.

Ethics Resource Center www.ethics.org

Ethics.org is the web site of the Washington DC based Ethics Resource Center. The institutional roots of ERC are in American Viewpoint, founded in 1922 to help immigrants to the US get oriented to American culture and values. In 1977 the mission was refocused under the Ethics Resource Center rubric. The vision is to foster a more ethical world. ERC publishes a monthly electronic newsletter called Ethics Today. ERC sponsors research on individual ethics (especially character development), organizational ethics (especially for business), and global ethics. This is a great organization with a web site that is a gold mine of helpful information on business ethics.

Ethisphere Institute www.ethisphere.com

The Ethisphere Institute and its web site and magazine are a relatively new resource aggressively promoting its criteria and ratings of ethical companies, and its membership-based Business Ethics Leadership Alliance. Interesting resources worth bookmarking and revisiting.

Institute for Business Ethics www.ibe.org.uk

Ibe.org.uk is the web site of the non-profit Institute for Business Ethics, established in 1986 in London. Part of the value of this site is that it provides a perspective from outside the USA. Most of the concerns are common to businesses in most parts of the world, of course. The IBE web site provides some simple, very concrete outlines and strategies for companies wishing to formulate and implement ethics policies, procedures, and codes. The IBE sponsors various seminars and discussion groups and publishes material on various business ethics themes. The IBE view of ethics tends to focus on dilemma and crisis resolution rather than on broader issues of mission, values, and corporate culture, but this is a good organization with something to teach us.

Institute for Business, Technology, & Ethics www.ethix.org

The IBTE and its bimonthly magazine *Ethix* was co-founded and co-directed by Boeing technology executive Al Erisman and business/technology ethicist David Gill from 1998 to 2003, since which time Erisman has been the Executive Director. The distinctive characteristic of the IBTE has been the conviction that technology is a driver that is recasting all of business and its ethics, and that all three factors must be considered together: business, technology, and ethics. Probably the most valuable feature of this web resource is the archive of interviews of business leaders

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics www.scu.edu/ethics/

The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University is one of the preeminent centers for research and dialogue on ethical issues in critical areas of American life. The center works with faculty, staff, students, community leaders, and the public to address ethical issues more effectively in teaching, research, and action. The center's focus areas are business, health care and biotechnology, character education, government, global leadership, technology, and emerging issues in ethics. Articles, cases, briefings, and dialogue in all fields of applied ethics are available on this site.

Society of Business Ethics www.societyforbusinessethics.org

Founded in 1980, the Society for Business Ethics (SBE) is a non-affiliated international association of scholars and others interested in business ethics. Membership in SBE is open to scholars and professional from all disciplines who specialize in business ethics, and to anyone else seeking the benefits of membership. The Society conducts an annual meeting for the presentation and discussion of new research; issues a newsletter with information of interest to members; supports the publication of the Ruffin Series in Business Ethics; and produces the scholarly journal *Business Ethics Quarterly*. Probably the most valuable feature at the SBE web site is the “Business Ethics Resources Page” which provides links to dozens of business ethics centers, publications, and programs.