Ethics: Using the Enneagram in Organizations
What the Experts Say
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This is the second of three articles about the ethics involved when using the Enneagram in organizations.

In the first article ("Wake up and Take Action: The Need for Us to Look at Ourselves"), I relied on my professional background as an organization development consultant, Enneagram teacher, author, and my current role as IEA (International Enneagram Association) president. For this article, I interviewed nine sets of experts to solicit their perspectives on the ethical issues involved when using the Enneagram in contemporary organizations. Each of them took the time to discuss this topic because it has important implications for the future of the Enneagram. The interviewees included the following:

- Mary Bast - co-author of *Out of the Box Coaching*
- Tom Condon - author of *The Enneagram Video Guide*
- David Daniels - co-author of *The Essential Enneagram*
- Michael Goldberg - author of *9 Ways of Working*
- Kathy Hurley and Theodorre Donson - co-authors of *What's My Type*
- Helen Palmer - author of *The Enneagram in Love and Work*
- Don Riso - co-author of *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*
- Bob Tallon - co-author of *From Awareness to Action*
- Jerry Wagner - author of *The Enneagram Spectrum of Personality Styles*

Notes: Russ Hudson was outside the United States during the writing of this article and was unavailable for an interview. Also, several of the individuals interviewed have written more than one Enneagram book; additional book titles were excluded due to space considerations.

The Basic Question: Should psychology be used in organizations and if so, under what circumstances?

Agree or Disagree?
Organizations are not in the business of psychological and personal growth for its own sake and people do not come to work to be psychologically analyzed and diagnosed.

Each person above was asked to respond to this statement. There was universal agreement among those interviewed that this statement was essentially true, and that it also raised issues related to the ethical underpinnings of using the Enneagram in

organizations. The following comments illuminate the issue of the implicit psychological contract between organizations and their employees:

> **Bast:** "People are generally leery of anything company-sponsored that is psychological, and employees worry about how it will be used."

> **Daniels:** "*The Cult of Personality* (Paul 2004), takes a scathing view of using personality tests in organizations because they are not predictive and people also feel these tests are an invasion of privacy. I agree with this. That is why self-inquiry and self-typing are so important. "

> **Goldberg**: "There is no agreement in an organization to expose yourself psychologically. Organizations exist to meet the expectations of shareholders, customers, managers, and employees and this does not include the organization as a place for psychological exploration for its own sake."

> **Wagner**: "Businesses are not there to develop the mental health of their employees. I'm not saying they shouldn't, just that they don't."

At the same time, all those interviewed acknowledged that the issue of using psychology in organizations is complex.

> **Condon:** "Although people don't come to work for psychological insight, when they learn the Enneagram, they get this anyway and are often touched by it. They say it not only improves their relationships at the office, it also makes a big difference at home."

> **Hurley & Donson:** "People want an atmosphere of trust at work. When they feel psychologized, trust stops. However, when used well, the Enneagram helps create an atmosphere of trust,"

> **Palmer**: "People do want to grow at work. In fact, they are usually delighted to do so. But they do not want to be analyzed and diagnosed."

> **Riso**: "Most people in the workplace would not have much interest in the world of personal growth as long as they and others were able to work together productively. However, this is not usually the case. People have conflicts, a great amount of time and productivity is wasted and because of this, psychological awareness and insight are both relevant and necessary."

> **Tallon**: "Although people don't come to work for psychological reasons and some resent the fact that you are trying to "shrink" them, executives can't help but get into the psychological because this answers the question about why they may not be functioning at the top level of performance."

Most Effective Applications of the Enneagram in Organizations

When asked about the most effective use of the Enneagram in organizations, there was a high level of agreement among those interviewed. The most frequently mentioned applications included the following: interpersonal skill development (communication, feedback, conflict), team development, leadership, coaching (on-the-job coaching, *not* career coaching), and sales and customer service.

Each person interviewed named multiple organizational applications of the Enneagram. Sample comments are included below to give you a sense of the range and nuances of their perspectives:

Interpersonal Skills – improving the interpersonal relationship skills of individuals in the following areas: (1) verbal, non-verbal, and behavioral skills when delivering and receiving information; (2) ability to constructively give and openly receive performance-related feedback; and (3) capacity to prevent, de-escalate and/or resolve conflict.

Goldberg: "In developing communication skills, the Enneagram can help you learn to understand where you are coming from, how to get out of your own way, and to realize that you are not the objective person you think you are. It also helps you understand where others are coming from."

Wagner: "In improving interpersonal relationships, the Enneagram is a helpful way to look at our lenses in the world. We all use lenses but don't pay attention to the fact that we are wearing them. Do they help us see clearly or do they narrow our worlds? It also helps us understand the lenses that others are wearing."

Team Development – increasing the ability of teams to achieve organizational objectives through developing the following areas: team goals, strategies, optimal levels of interdependence, team charter and authority parameters, structure, roles, decision-making processes, communication and information flow systems, conflict resolution approaches, team leadership, team climate and culture, and reward systems.

Bast: "The Enneagram is useful in team building as long as the team building is grounded in theory. By this I mean team development that is an on-going process, *not* an off-the-shelf program, and design, strategy development, processes, communication, decision-making, conflict management and more. There is no organizational dynamic where the Enneagram can't be used."

Hurley & Donson: "In team building, the Enneagram helps you develop a sense of compassion It must help teams become more effective in the organization. It goes way beyond getting people to work better together. It also goes beyond goals, roles and responsibilities. What is their vision and goals in terms of how they support the organization's success? This includes their overall structure about people who are different from you. It then spreads more broadly into other areas of a person's life."

Palmer: "When I worked with division heads who were part of an executive team, they began to stop taking each other's mannerisms personally. They also realized that a person's mannerisms reflect his or her Enneagram type and are not a reflection of how capable someone is to do his or her job."

Leadership – providing guidance, direction, and stewardship to an organization or organizational unit in such a way that the organization achieves its goals, the organization's stakeholders are satisfied, and employees are enlisted appropriately in the process.

Bast: "Using the Enneagram in leadership development is our competitive edge. The Center for Creative Leadership shows that the best leaders are flexible, sensitive, innovative, and non-doctrinaire. The Enneagram can help people identify their developmental needs with minimal defensiveness. Most systems make people feel defensive. The Enneagram shows that there are strengths and blind sides in everyone, so no one feels singled out or defensive."

Daniels: "There is a powerful quote from *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* (Bossidy & Charan 2002): 'Leaders get the behaviors they exhibit and tolerate.' How you behave as a leader becomes an important part of the organizational culture. Leaders need to understand that their impact is huge, and the Enneagram is an excellent way to help them recognize this."

Coaching **–** in a one-on-one coaching relationship, helping people -- through listening, providing perspective, offering feedback, and giving advice -- to become as effective as possible with respect to performance issues that are job related and aligned with the organization's goals.

Riso: "Among the best uses for the Enneagram is in coaching, from executives down to line workers. Personalities are constantly influencing the workplace for good or ill. The Enneagram

touches people because it resonates with the truth about human nature that they already know in their hearts."

Tallon: "Using the Enneagram in coaching helps clients see why they do the things they do: why they want control, why they have conflicts with others, how they lead, and to stop taking their interactions with others so personally as they begin to see it's more related to automatic behavior driven by type."

Sales and Customer Service – providing customers with products and services that meet their needs and backing up these products and services with after-purchase support.

Condon: "Applying the Enneagram to customer service and sales improves what people deliver and the way they deliver it. Not only does the Enneagram support the achievement of the organization's goals, it also gets under people's skin in a beneficial way such as understanding relationships and realizing that there are truly different points of view."

Tallon: "When integrated with a substantive selling model, the Enneagram is very effective. I focus on the salesperson's strengths and derailers as they relate to Enneagram type, but use a sales model to provide the context."

Ethical Guidelines for Using the Enneagram in Organizations
Those interviewed had a great deal to say about the topic of ethics and using the Enneagram in organizations. Their comments fell into the six areas below:

Don't Use the Enneagram to Box People In

Condon: "Don't over-apply the Enneagram or mistake the part for the whole. People are far more than their Enneagram type. You may think you have people in a nutshell, but all you have is a nutshell."

Daniels: "All systems, including the Enneagram, can devolve into stereotyping. We need to be careful we don't do this and don't teach it in a way that others use it in this destructive manner."

Goldberg: "People are far more complex than their Enneagram type. We have to *not* box people by Enneagram type and encourage others to not do this either."

Tallon: "Don't use the Enneagram as an excuse for behavior. Identifying too closely with type masks who we really are and inhibits our growth. It is a another way people can box themselves in."

Make Using the Enneagram in Organizations Psychologically Safe

Honor Confidentiality Agreements
Bast: "Sharing people's Enneagram styles has to be the choice of the individual, not mine or other people's. People put their trust in me not to disclose this information."

Encourage Voluntary Participation in Enneagram Programs
Riso: "It should be voluntary. When people are shown the benefit of something, they usually want to take part. If they are forced into taking an Enneagram workshop, it will rarely be beneficial."

Tallon: "Having a remedial coaching client who doesn't want to be there and doesn't want to be psychologized in any way will be a challenging and counter-productive experience."

Present the Enneagram Accurately and Comprehensively

Condon: "The Enneagram is not a party game. We need to make sure we teach it thoroughly and accurately so people do not treat it casually or superficially."

Palmer: "People need to know what they know well and know what they don't know when teaching the Enneagram. People need to not overstep themselves and need to become fully competent. Know your limits."

Wagner: "Make sure you know the Enneagram well if you are going to teach it. Know the limits and parameters of any system, and that includes the Enneagram. The Enneagram is a very useful system, but it is not a revelation. It is my favorite system because it is comprehensive and deep and broad enough to integrate and hold other ways of understanding human thought, feelings, and behavior. Still, it is only a system."

Do Your Own Inner Work

Condon: "Be a good role model of how to use and apply the Enneagram. If you are prone to stereotyping and/or dislike or do not understand a particular type, this is your shadow. Work on yourself and eradicate these biases."

Hurley and Donson: "People can negate other people because they don't like a certain type. It is a form of violence in the way Maurice Nicoll uses the word. Violence is any lack of respect for self or others. This includes gossiping and negating other people. Do your own work so that you do not do violence to any of the Enneagram types."

Don't Use the Enneagram for Selection, De-selection or Promotion

Condon: "I know someone who gave Enneagram tests to potential new employees. Not only is this questionable legally, it is a misuse. If people do this, they may get a good fit for the people they currently have employed, but they lose variation on the team or in the workforce."

Daniels: "For job selection, you want skills and you want psychologically healthy, well-developed people. Once you have skills and psychological maturity, you can help employees grow using the Enneagram as a resource. No type is better than any other type for anything, including jobs."

Tallon: "This is a very slippery slope. People of all types can be good at the same job. Using the Enneagram for selection not only raises ethical issues, it will reduce the Enneagram's credibility because it does not predict job performance."

Don't Use the Enneagram to Manipulate People

Daniels: "Knowledge is power. If you know someone's type, you can manipulate him or her. Influencing, as opposed to manipulation, is direct and forthright. Manipulation is hidden. When you know the Enneagram, you can easily abuse your power. Share the knowledge."

Goldberg: "Working with people to get a certain result and working on them psychologically without their knowledge is manipulative. The difference between using the Enneagram ethically versus using it in a manipulative way is that when used ethically, the individual uses the Enneagram from a place of honor and integrity."

So What, Now What?

So what can be done to help ensure that the Enneagram is used wisely, constructively, accurately, and ethically in organizations? Here are some ideas for Enneagram teachers and the IEA (International Enneagram Association).

Enneagram Teachers Are Critical

Teachers need to examine their own behavior

Bast, Condon, and Tallon: "Ask that everyone using the Enneagram in organizations adhere to the IEA code of ethics on the IEA website, although this is hard to enforce."

Condon: "Individuals who work with the Enneagram need to keep learning about both the system and themselves."

Daniels: "All of us who teach it in organizations, and this includes working with profits and non-profits and in every industry both secular and religious, need to pay attention to ethics and continue examining our own behavior."

Hurley & Donson: "We have to live what we teach."

Riso: "The Enneagram has to not only be used ethically, it has to be used with precision, dignity, compassion, and as a means to human liberation. An amateurish use of the Enneagram will backfire in the long run, almost always hurting those who do this. The Enneagram, however, won't be hurt because it comes from a higher level of consciousness."

Teachers need to make ethics an explicit topic in their trainings

Wagner: "At all the trainings we do, we need to mention the ethical uses of the Enneagram. At all the certificate programs, we need to include the requirement of demonstrated skills to ensure people are competent."

The IEA Has an Important Role to Play

IEA and related publications such as the EM should keep ethics on people's minds

Goldberg and Hurley & Donson: "Keep writing articles like these in the *Enneagram Monthly* so it stays on our minds."

Palmer: "The soon-to-be *IEA Enneagram Journal* is a good starting place for these ideas to be discussed."

Wagner: "Include a column in each quarterly *9 Points* [the IEA quarterly newsletter] on the ethical uses of the Enneagram to keep it on our minds."

IEA should get members involved

Goldberg: "We could create a study group within the IEA to study the ethical use of the Enneagram in organizations."

Wagner: "At each IEA conference, include a panel on ethics and the Enneagram."

IEA could become more rigorous

Bast: "Perhaps the IEA can credential business consultants or do something to hold people to a high standard, although this is complex to implement."

Daniels: "As the IEA gets stronger, and it is, it can take a stronger stand on these important ethical issues."

Palmer: "The IEA standards are good, but ethics in word is not the same as ethics in action. The IEA could sponsor a good program that reviews these ethical issues and even qualifies people."

Final Messages on Ethics and the Enneagram in Organizations

Each of those interviewed was asked what message he or she most wanted to leave with readers of this article. Here is what they said:

Mary Bast: "Don't go into an organization selling the Enneagram. Go in at a systems level, team level, or individual level. Find out what their needs are and then see if the Enneagram fits their

needs. If it doesn't, don't use it. Make sure you have other tools in your repertoire that would meet their needs. Otherwise, don't do the work."

Tom Condon: "Let the Enneagram keep teaching you. When you think you have lightning in a bottle, you have just plateaued. And when you are teaching the Enneagram in an organization, give them more than they expect. Give them the depth of the system so it hits them in unexpected and beneficial ways. This is also a hedge against their using it superficially or misrepresenting it."

David Daniels: "The ethical use of the Enneagram is of seminal importance because the Enneagram is so powerful and, therefore, subject to abuse. Be mindful of this at all times."

Michael Goldberg: "Remember that the Enneagram has long roots that should be studied and honored. We have put too much emphasis on conventional words for the fixations and passions. For example, *vanity* for Threes is really about vainglory or pride in one's work rather than a fishing for compliments or seeking adulation, which are more superficial ways of looking at it. All Enneagram teachers should keep this idea in their hearts: The Enneagram is centrally about compassion."

Kathy Hurley and Theodorre Donson: "Start with yourself. Know what triggers you. Disengage from the negative aspects of your type. From this, you gain humility, the other issues fall into place, and your responses flow from a place of integrity."

Helen Palmer: "The importance of quality and ethics to the Enneagram can not be overstated. Be willing to look at yourself, to change, and to be a seeker. Be a grown-up and be competent."

Don Riso: "The Enneagram is not ours, and we cannot control how it is used by others. We do have to concern ourselves with our own personal integrity."

Bob Tallon: "The book *Megatrends 2010* says that there is a fundamental trend toward consciousness in organizations, both conscious investing and the use of spiritual values in organizations – for example caring, compassion, courage, and harmony. The Enneagram is poised to capitalize on this important trend in work and society."

Jerry Wagner: "Don't teach or say anything about the Enneagram unless you really know what you're talking about."

Summary

Let me express my appreciation to all those interviewed for taking the time to talk and for being so thoughtful in their responses about this important topic. Part III of this series will include case studies of organizations that are using the Enneagram successfully in order to discover how the Enneagram is currently being used, to uncover ethical issues that have arisen, and to learn how these concerns have been dealt with.

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