



# How to Identify Ethical Practices in Organizations Prior to Employment

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## Abstract

Behavior analysts likely can evaluate multiple organizations prior to accepting a job due to recent increases in the number of organizations providing ABA services. We argue that evaluating the ethical values of an organization is paramount during the job search process. We provide strategies for evaluating the ethical values of an organization prior to employment and describe considerations from the pre-application process through contract negotiations. Ultimately, we add to the growing body of literature that provides guidance for common problems behavior analysts may face over the course of their careers.

**Keywords** Autism · Behavior analysis · Ethics · Employment

Behavior analysts are entering the job market in record numbers and pursuing jobs specific to behavior-analytic service delivery due to an increasing trend in individuals receiving certification from the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB®) (Deochand & Fuqua, 2016). As a result, more agencies are being established or creating intra-agency divisions that provide behavior-analytic jobs related to treatment for individuals with autism (Burning Glass Technologies, 2015). Given the increase in jobs, the funding for autism services, and overall demand for behavior-analytic services, Board Certified Behavior Analysts® and Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analysts® (hereafter referred to as behavior analysts) are likely in a position to evaluate multiple potential employers.

When searching for a place of employment, a behavior analyst may consider many variables that affect where he or she applies to work. For example, important factors to consider include location of the employer, cost of living, and the requirements and scope of the job itself (Hill, 2012). In addition, a behavior analyst may consider professional development opportunities that are available while working at

an organization as well as opportunities for organizational growth and promotion. Just as a behavior analyst should evaluate the abovementioned components of a job, the extent to which the organization expects employees to engage in ethical conduct, and actively supports those expectations, should be an important consideration for the behavior analyst during the job search process.

Considering the ethical values of an organization,<sup>1</sup> along with the contingencies that may compete with upholding ethical values, is critical to consider during the job search process. Appraising ethical values of an organization is critical because organizations are not within the regulatory jurisdiction of the BACB®. Individual behavior analysts are bound to the BACB® Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts (2014a, hereafter referred to as the BACB® Code). However, if contingencies within an organization select unethical responses, behavior analysts are accountable for disciplinary action from the BACB®, but the organization is not. Subsequently, tension may exist if the contingencies operating on the organization and behavior analysts do not align or support the same patterns of behavior.

A professional credential protects a behavior analyst's opportunity to practice and his or her professional identity (Moore & Shook, 2001). Working for an organization that values ethics could help a behavior analyst protect his or her

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we often refer to organizations as behaving organisms (e.g., having ethical values). We understand that organisms behave, and organizations do not. However, we have chosen this terminology in order to emphasize that the behavior analyst evaluates not only the individuals within an organization, but also the organizational policies and procedures established by individuals within an organization.

professional credential and reputation as a behavior analyst. When an organization expects a behavior analyst to emit behavior incongruent with the BACB® Code, it may place the behavior analyst's credential at risk. For example, a behavior analyst's credential may be at risk for disciplinary action if an organization requires him or her to implement or supervise non-behavioral interventions (e.g., FloorTime) and the behavior analyst does not disclose to a client that the non-behavioral treatment is not covered by his or her BACB® credential (see BACB® Code 8.01). In another example, an organizational policy may allow accepting gifts with a monetary value of \$50 or less from clients. Behavior analysts following this policy may be in violation of BACB® Code 1.06d. In both examples, behavior analysts, not the organization, would be in potential violation of the BACB® Code.

There are additional benefits to working for an organization that shares ethical values similar to the ethical values of the BACB® Code. Ambrose, Arnaud, and Schminke (2008) found that employees who work for organizations with similar ethical values are likely to work longer for, and be more committed to, that organization. In a recent review of ethical leadership, Kio, Ma, Bartnik, Haney, and Kang (2017) found that employees who work for individuals who are ethical leaders (e.g., exhibits interactional justice and ethical ideology) are more likely to engage in ethical behavior themselves.

Organizations that provide ABA services may also benefit from explicitly supporting the BACB® Code. First, organizations with policies that embrace the BACB® Code may become preferred places of employment and more easily recruit top behavior-analytic professionals. Second, organizational climates characterized by trust and ethics are more sustainable (e.g., Rego, e Cunha, & Polónia, 2015). Finally, maintaining an ethical organizational culture may improve the quality of care and protection for consumers (e.g., Rogers, Anthony, & Danley, 1989). Ultimately, explicitly supporting the BACB® Code as an organization may improve the brand and name recognition of the organization and the ABA services it provides (Brodhead & Higbee, 2012).

Ethical codes can be limited in providing necessary guidance to practitioners attempting to be ethical in unethical places (e.g., Steere & Dowdall, 1990). The BACB® Code 1.04 outlines that "behavior analysts make known their commitment to this Code and take steps to resolve the conflict in a responsible manner in accordance with the law." However, following this guideline may not be adequate to protect a behavior analyst from engaging in inappropriate behavior at the request of his or her organization. First, being able to follow BACB® Code 1.04 assumes a behavior analyst readily identifies the incongruence between organizational practices and the BACB® Code. A lack of understanding of questionable practices may occur because the organizational practices appear appropriate, institutionalized, and harmless. Second, if a behavior analyst does recognize the BACB® Code does not

align with organizational policy, he or she may feel undue pressure to violate the BACB® Code because questioning the contingencies that select the behavior may lead to unfavorable outcomes (e.g., poor reviews, missed promotions, termination of employment). Third, if organizational change occurs but some degree of issue remains, it may become challenging for the behavior analyst to take further action. For instance, if a behavior analyst was bound by a non-compete clause, he or she may not be able to terminate his or her contract without having to relocate. Terminating a non-compete clause will likely become potentially lengthy, costly, and effortful to resolve when differences are not reconciled. Given the difficulty of creating organizational change and the potential cost to maintaining professional credentials, it may be better for a behavior analyst to evaluate the ethical values of an organization prior to accepting a job.

It is important to emphasize that we are not suggesting all organizations request behavior analysts behave in ways that are incongruent with the BACB® Code. Also, we recognize that, from time to time, behavior analysts and organizational leaders may need to and successfully resolve differences between an organization and the BACB® Code. However, in both examples described above, identification of the values of an organization that are incongruent with the BACB® Code *prior* to accepting a job at that organization would reduce the likelihood the behavior analyst would put him or herself in a position of violating the BACB® Code.

The purpose of this paper is to outline strategies to assist a behavior analyst in identifying and appraising the ethical values of an organization prior to employment. Though the strategies we outline in this paper have not yet been empirically evaluated, such strategies may serve as a starting point to help behavior analysts avoid working for organizations that request behaviors incongruent with the BACB® Code. Our recommendations are based on over 40 years of combined experience in clinical settings for individuals with autism. We discuss the process of evaluating the ethical values of an organization from the initial job search through the contract negotiation process. Though this paper is primarily designed to guide behavior analysts pursuing careers in autism service delivery, the suggestions may also be applicable to behavior analysts providing services in additional human-service delivery settings. Our suggestions may also be applicable for individuals who are seeking an undergraduate or graduate degree in behavior analysis (or a related field) and have multiple choices between field experience placements. Ultimately, this paper adds to the growing body of literature that provides practical and straight-forward guidance for common ethical and professional issues confronted by behavior analysts during their professional practice (e.g., Brodhead, 2015; Newhouse-Oisten, Peck, Conway, & Frieder, 2017; Sellers, Alai-Rosales, & MacDonald, 2016).

## Identifying Ethical Practices in Organizations

Our recommendations are meant to serve as a starting point for variables or actions a behavior analyst may consider when looking for a job with value congruence between the behavior analyst and an organization (e.g., Herbst & Houmanfar, 2009). Based on previously published literature (e.g., Hayes, Gifford, & Hayes, 1998; Herbst & Houmanfar, 2009; Leigland, 2005), we define ethical behavior as the emission of behavior in compliance/coordination with the verbally stated rules and behavior-analytic cultural practices guiding practitioner behavior that are espoused by the BACB® Code. This definition would include the establishment of formal or informal organizational contingencies that target verbal and non-verbal behavior in compliance with the verbal rules provided by the BACB® Code. We caution that our recommendations are preliminary and suggest behavior analysts consider legal counsel if they have questions about the specific laws and regulations we briefly discuss. Below, we outline an analytical process for evaluating the ethical values of organizations—from pre-interview strategies through contract negotiations.

### Pre-interview

The process of screening ethical values of an organization begins at the onset of the job search. Once the behavior analyst has created a list of potential employers, he or she should begin to gather information about the reputation of each organization. This information may be obtained from a number of sources. These sources include the behavior analyst's academic advisor (if available), previous employees at that organization, the Better Business Bureau® (if applicable), consumer-advocacy organizations, and online review platforms (e.g., Yelp® and Google®). Engaging in this screening process allows behavior analysts to rule out organizations engaging in questionable practices before sending out applications.

Information seeking also allows the behavior analyst to develop questions to ask if he or she is invited to interview. For example, a behavior analyst may learn through interviews that an organization provides little supervision to employees and little support for additional training and professional development (see Sellers, Alai-Rosales, & MacDonald, 2016, for a list of recommended supervisory practices). He or she may then ask questions specific to supervision and professional development during an interview. In another example, a behavior analyst may learn from a colleague that individuals within an organization may not adequately manage its health records and digital communication (see Cavalari, Gillis, Kruser, & Romanczyk, 2015). This information may set the occasion for the behavior analyst to pay attention to these practices while on an interview. A behavior analyst might also discover that an organization has an ethics coordinator position (Brodhead & Higbee, 2012). That behavior analyst may

then inquire about the role of the ethics coordinator and how he or she can get involved in maintaining the ethical culture at the organization.

### Interview

If invited for an interview, there are several questions a behavior analyst may ask to further understand the ethical values of the organization and how they may align with the BACB® Code. The behavior analyst should be aware that the purpose of an interview involves the organization evaluating the behavior analyst *and* the behavior analyst evaluating the organization. Both entities are seeking to determine whether the job is a good fit for all parties (see O'Rourke, 2014). Fact finding during the interview process likely will focus on how the values of the organization align with the BACB® Code (i.e., value congruence—Herbst & Houmanfar, 2009). The behavior analyst should also understand the organization may employ multiple professionals who are bound by various ethical codes, and therefore, the organization must consider many ethical codes when making decisions (Cox, 2018).

There are several questions a behavior analyst may ask during an interview. In Table 1, we provide a list of questions a behavior analyst may consider asking to help evaluate the ethical values of an organization. We also provide the rationale for each question, supporting citations, and the supporting BACB® Code. This table is designed to serve as a starting point to get behavior analysts thinking about questions to ask during an interview. It would be difficult, and beyond the scope of this paper, to identify every potential question a behavior analyst should ask relative to ethics. Below, we further elaborate on some of the talking points listed in Table 1.

**Professional Development** In a survey of 469 behavior analysts, Schreck and Mazur (2008) found that not all behavior analysts reported using behavior-analytic practices in their treatment of autism. Furthermore, some respondents reported using non-evidence-based treatments. A follow-up study conducted by Schreck, Karunaratne, Zane, and Wilford (2016) obtained similar results. These findings highlight the need for continued professional development beyond the completion of a degree program and certification by the BACB®.

Behavior analysts should consider asking how the organization supports access to behavior-analytic literature and formal professional development (BACB® Code 1.03). The purpose of these questions is to understand how the organization supports professional development, supports efforts for the behavior analyst to maintain his or her credential, and is open to development opportunities for its employees that occur outside of that organization (e.g., professional conferences and workshops—see Carr & Briggs, 2010 for a list of strategies to maintain contact with the professional literature). A related question may be to ask how the organization fosters

**Table 1** Sample interview topics and questions

Sample interview topics and question	Supporting BACB® Code(s)
Professional development. How does the organization support my access to the behavior-analytic literature and formal professional development? Purpose: To understand how the organization supports ongoing professional development, through continuing access to professional literature and professional conferences (Carr & Briggs, 2010).	1.03; 7.0
Training and supervision. Describe the systems that are in place to help employees engage in ethical behavior and avoid unethical behavior. Purpose: To identify systems the organization has in place to teach and maintain ethical behavior within that organization (Brodhead & Higbee, 2012).	7.01
Training and supervision. Describe the organizational practices for supervising all employees. Purpose: To evaluate the extent to which supervision practices align with the BACB® Code (Sellers, Alai-Rosales, & MacDonald, 2016).	5.01–5.07
Training and supervision. How are interpersonal problems, between supervisors and supervisees, addressed within the organization? Purpose: To understand systems for conflict resolution within the organization (Sellers, LeBlanc, & Valentino, 2016).	5.01–5.07
Scope of competence. Does the organization foresee any significant shift in population served? If so, how will the organization ensure I obtain the competence needed to work with that new population? Purpose: To review the extent to which the organization is prepared to provide additional training if a behavior analyst is asked to work with a new population (LeBlanc, Heinicke, & Baker, 2012).	1.02
Health records. How are electronic health records managed? Purpose: To evaluate how data and record handling aligns with relevant laws and the BACB® Code (Cavalari et al., 2015).	2.07; 2.11
Collaboration. How does the organization collaborate with other providers to create a continuum of care? Purpose: To evaluate organizational systems for interdisciplinary collaboration that meet the needs of the client and also align with ethical obligations (Brodhead, 2015; Cox, 2012; Newhouse-Oisten et al., 2017).	2.03
Cultural competence. How does the organization accommodate the cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve? Purpose: To evaluate how cultural values are recognized within service delivery, in order to accommodate clients from various cultural backgrounds (Fong, Catagnus, Brodhead, Quigley, & Field, 2016).	1.05

professional development practices regarding ethical behavior specifically.

**Training and Supervision** The behavior analyst may ask his or her potential employer to describe how the organization implements training and supervision strategies that foster an ethical environment. In some cases, organizations may have specific training materials related to ethics, or they may have a specific person who is designated as an ethics expert within that organization (Brodhead & Higbee, 2012). The behavior analyst may also inquire about the organizational practices for supervising employees (see Sellers, Alai-Rosales, & MacDonald, 2016 for a list of supervision practices that align with the BACB® Code). Furthermore, the behavior analyst may ask how interpersonal problems that occur between supervisors and supervisees are addressed and resolved within the organization (see Sellers, LeBlanc, & Valentino, 2016).

A study by DiGennaro Reed and Henley (2015) highlights the need for considering the training and supervision practices within an organization. DiGennaro Reed and Henley conducted a survey of 382 behavior analysts and found that training and supervision practices vary considerably across providers. Of note, 29% of respondents reported that ongoing training at their organization was not available. Researchers also found that 45% of respondents reported they were not exposed to

any kind of orientation or training upon hire and before they were able to work independently. These findings underscore the importance of inquiring about training and supervisory practices, as they can vary greatly from agency to agency.

**Scope of Competency** The BACB® Code (1.02) expresses that behavior analysts only provide services for which they are qualified to provide. Therefore, the behavior analyst should ask if he or she will be expected to provide services to individuals he or she is not explicitly trained to serve. If the organization anticipates a shift in the populations it serves, the behavior analyst could ask how the organization will ensure he or she receives training necessary to be competent to serve those individuals (see LeBlanc et al., 2012, for a list of recommendations for expanding a behavioral skill set in human-service settings).

**Health Records** Though federal law (e.g., HIPAA) and state law describe legal requirements for handling health records, the BACB® Code (2.07, 2.11) also describes standards for handling records. In addition to handling physical records, many organizational and business settings increasingly rely on mobile and cloud-based data storage and management (Cooney, 2012; US Federal Government, 2017). Behavior-analytic service settings are likely no different, and thus, the



behavior analyst may want to inquire about how electronic health records are managed in order to understand how organizational practices align with state and federal laws and the BACB® Code. Cavalari et al. (2015) offer suggestions for appropriate maintenance of digital health records and further describe the importance of such actions.

**Collaboration** While providing behavior-analytic treatment for individuals with autism, a behavior analyst is likely to interact with a wide range of non-behavioral colleagues (Brodhead, 2015; Cox, 2012). During these interactions, a behavior analyst should take care to interact with colleagues in ways that maintain professional relationships (Brodhead, 2015) and ensures all parties are privy to changes that occur during treatment (Newhouse-Oisten et al., 2017). Because collaborative and conflict management behaviors are rarely taught in behavior-analytic undergraduate and graduate training programs (Kelly & Tincani, 2013), we recommend behavior analysts inquire about support that is provided to employees who work with professionals from varied disciplines to promote appropriate professional collaborations (BACB® Code 2.03).

**Cultural Competence** Skinner (1953) defined culture as variables arranged by other people. The BACB® Code 1.05 states that behavior analysts recognize the role of culture and their own cultural biases and understand how they may affect service delivery. Though recent literature reviews suggest that the effects of cultural differences on behavior-analytic outcomes are not well understood (Brodhead, Durán, & Bloom, 2014; Li, Wallace, Ehrhardt, & Poling, 2017), there are a few empirical efforts that demonstrate the importance of culture in behavior-analytic service delivery for individuals with autism. Most notably, researchers have demonstrated that language of assessment and treatment may affect client outcomes and preferences (Aguilar, Chan, White, & Fragale, 2017; Rispoli et al., 2011). Given the findings of this emerging line of research, a culturally competent organization may understand that language of instruction may affect client outcomes and understand that client values (i.e., reinforcers) may vary across cultures. Additional recommendations suggest that culturally competent organizations make efforts to recruit diverse employees and provide ongoing training in cultural competency (see Fong & Tanaka, 2013 for a list of standards for cultural competence in behavior analysis).

Speaking generally, a culturally competent organization is one in which leaders understand their own cultural biases and how their organizational policies can be adapted to accommodate individuals from different cultural backgrounds. We recommend the behavior analyst asks how an organization accommodates the cultural backgrounds of the clients it serves and how it may adapt, when necessary, to ensure it engages in culturally competent service delivery. For a more comprehensive treatment of cultural competence

in behavior analysis, we refer the reader to Fong et al. (2016) and Fong and Tanaka (2013).

## Additional Considerations

**Individuals Not Certified by the BACB®** If the behavior analyst has an opportunity to meet with a potential supervisor or owner who is not certified by the BACB®, he or she may ask about ethical behavior and the role ethics plays in day-to-day business practice. A related question may be to ask how important the potential supervisor considers the BACB® Code and how it uses the BACB® Code to inform supervisory decisions. Though non-certified individuals are not held to the BACB® Code, they may support and adhere to different (and perhaps similar) ethical values. The take-home point of this recommendation is that the organization should value the professional guidelines of the behavior analyst and make assurances those guidelines are important values that behavior analysts will be able to uphold. At a minimum, the organization should recognize the behavior analyst is bound by the BACB® Code to maintain certification.

**Asking Appropriate Questions** Excessive, direct questioning (e.g., “Do you know that receiving gifts constitutes a multiple relationship?”) may be off-putting to potential employers. Some examples of appropriate questions include the following: “Can you tell me more about how you encourage behavior analysts to rely on scientific knowledge when designing interventions?”; “We work so closely, and often very intensively, with families. How do you conceptualize multiple relationships and help behavior analysts to navigate them?”; “I recognize there is a fine balance between accepting clients and having available resources to support the clients. What are the variables the organization considers when accepting a new client?” In addition to appropriately phrasing questions, we recommend questions about ethics are included with the multitude of other question topics commonly discussed during a job interview (e.g., job responsibilities, workplace culture, and employee benefits).

We also recommend the behavior analyst considers the context in which he or she asks each question. For example, it may be contextually appropriate to ask questions about record keeping when an individual interviewing the behavior analyst brings up the topic of data management. If this question were asked out of context (e.g., during a discussion about supervision), it may be perceived as off-putting. Therefore, behavior analysts should consider the context in which they ask each question and whether it is an appropriate time to ask that question.

**Observations and Consistency of Reports** During the interview, we encourage the behavior analyst to observe reported policies and procedures being carried out in the clinical

environment. For example, if a behavior analyst learns that supervisors provide feedback to front-line employees daily, the behavior analyst should look for supervisors providing frequent feedback within the clinic. A lack of continuity between what is said during an interview and what is observed in the clinical environment can be a potential warning sign. That is, it may indicate the practices that are described during an interview are not what takes place in that organization.

The behavior analyst should also take note of consistency in reports between the people with whom he or she speaks during the interview. Consistent answers to questions likely indicate good communication within the organization. Consistent answers also likely indicate that employees are aware of policies and procedures about which the behavior analyst inquired. Inconsistent answers may be a potential warning sign. For example, if a behavior analyst employed by the organization says “I supervise my front-line employees daily” and a front-line employee says “I’m supervised once or twice a week,” the behavior analyst should consider if those inconsistent answers may set the occasion for additional follow-up questions about organizational procedures are necessary. In this case, the behavior analyst may further inquire on how the organization provides supervision on an ongoing basis, per BACB® Code 5.06.

## Contract Negotiations

In the following section, we provide recommendations for the contract negotiation process. Our recommendations are based on consultation with a human resource lawyer who received a Juris Doctor in 2012 from the John Marshall Law School. She has over 5 years of contract and regulatory experience, has over 4 years of experience in employment law and relations, and holds a bar license in the State of Illinois.

Our recommendations are general, and they are meant to inform the behavior analyst only on the general principles behind these concepts. The behavior analyst should recognize that laws and legal precedent often change and can vary from state to state. Therefore, we emphasize that a behavior analyst obtain legal counsel if he or she has any questions regarding these items during the contract negotiation process.

**Non-compete Clauses** We recommend caution when signing a non-compete clause, if a behavior analyst is offered a job and asked to sign a non-compete clause. A non-compete clause is usually an agreement that defines “the length of time, a geographical radius and type of activity in which the employee promises to refrain from working after leaving his/her job” (Mullins, 2014, p. 26). For example, a non-compete clause may stipulate that an employee may not practice behavior analysis with individuals with autism in any capacity within a 50-mile radius for 2 years upon terminating employment with an agency. Though this stipulation may sound

reasonable, we recommend the behavior analyst considers the following information about non-compete clauses.

Non-compete clauses have a primary purpose of helping organizations maintain trade secrets. A non-compete clause would likely prohibit employees from exposing trade secrets to a competitor, if they leave a company. The threat of sharing trade secrets is mostly prevalent in technology sectors, and it seems rarely to be relevant in clinical behavior analysis settings.

Research also suggests non-compete clauses negatively impact employees and the organizations. For example, non-compete clauses limit the bargaining power of employees and can induce workers to leave occupations entirely (United States Department of Treasury, 2016). In addition, non-compete clauses have been reported to reduce employee productivity and economic growth (Amir & Lobel, 2014). In some states, such as Illinois, non-compete clauses are being widely contested in court because individuals who sign non-competes do not actually possess trade secrets (Georgiadis, 2014). Furthermore, scholars have argued that local and state economies are more likely to thrive when non-compete clauses are not enforced, and economic growth is hindered when they are enforced (Gilson, 1999). Though up to 30 million employees within the USA have signed non-compete clauses, the U.S. Treasury Department (2016) found that many employees do not actually understand the negative implications of signing a non-compete clause.

Signing a non-compete clause may create undue pressure for a behavior analyst to continue working at an organization despite concerns about ethical behaviors of the organization. Though non-compete clauses may not be enforceable in one’s area of employment, challenging a non-compete clause in court would likely be burdensome (e.g., time and financial cost of legal fees). If the behavior analyst is presented with a non-compete clause, we recommend he or she considers asking it be removed from the contract before signing it. Signing a contract without a non-compete clause would allow a behavior analyst to leave an organization if he or she was unable to resolve a difficult ethical situation.

In some cases, non-compete clauses may help prevent a behavior analyst from stealing clients from an organization. For example, a behavior analyst may be asked to sign a non-compete clause that stipulates he or she may not take organizational clients when leaving that organization.<sup>2</sup> It seems justified that some agreement about acquiring clients should be in place between the behavior analyst and the organization with regard to client propriety. However, the need to protect an

<sup>2</sup> For this example, BACB® Code 2.15c may be helpful. Specifically, this guideline states that a behavior analyst beginning employment or signing a contract should proactively “provide for orderly and appropriate resolution of responsibility for services in the event that the employment or contractual relationship ends, with paramount consideration given to the welfare of the ultimate beneficiary of services.” (p. 10).

organization from having clients unjustly taken from it may not justify a non-compete clause that places undue burden upon the behavior analyst or may not be legally enforceable. Nevertheless, the complexities of non-compete clauses underscore the importance of consulting with legal counsel before signing a non-compete clause.

**Parol Evidence** Clarifying job roles and agreements within the contract may protect the behavior analyst from either being asked to do something incongruent with conversations had during the interview or being expected to engage in behavior that does not align with the BACB® Code. Detailed contracts may protect the behavior analyst because employment agreements between the employer and employee are in writing. This concept is commonly referred to as parol evidence, which generally means that any conversations (e.g., e-mails and face to face agreements) cannot be introduced in interpreting the contract if there was a dispute. Though verbal promises may be kept by an employer, we encourage the behavior analyst to obtain as much detail in writing as possible prior to accepting the position. For example, if an employer tells a behavior analyst that he or she will be reimbursed for miles driven to and from different clinical locations, this agreement should be detailed in the contract, along with the standard rate of reimbursement (usually, per mile).

We also recommend the behavior analyst explicitly ask to have his or her caseload outlined within the employment contract. For example, if the organization tells the behavior analyst that a standard caseload is 15 clients, the behavior analyst may ask for the contract to state he or she will not be assigned more than 15 clients at a time (see the BACB's® 2014b report on practice guidelines for healthcare funders and managers, for a description of recommendations regarding caseload). Another example of clarified job roles within a contract would be to ask for the contract to explicitly state the employer will abide by the BACB® Code and hold the behavior analyst to the BACB® Code. Or, the behavior analyst may request that the organization honors conscientious objection to any organizational practice that is not congruent with the BACB® Code (see Wicclair, 2000). The behavior analyst may also ask for the contract to explicitly state he or she will only be expected to operate within his or her scope of competency and to conduct behavior-analytic services within the scope of his or her training.

**Mutual Benefit** Finally, it is important behavior analysts understand the significance of being asked to sign additional contractual agreements after an initial contract is signed. For example, a supervisor may approach a behavior analyst and say, "The leadership team just met and agreed to require non-compete clauses for all of our employees. So, we'd like you to sign this." If an additional contract is presented, the behavior analyst is cautioned against signing it unless there is

consideration within the contract that benefits the behavior analyst as well. That is, both parties (i.e., the organization and the behavior analyst) should benefit from any contractual agreement. However, depending on the employment status of that behavior analyst (e.g., his or her employment status is up for renewal), his or her continued employment may qualify as the consideration that is often required for a contract to be enforced or upheld. Because instances when only employers benefit from contractual agreements are considered poor practice, we recommend a behavior analyst consider obtaining legal counsel if asked to sign an additional contract where he or she cannot readily identify how he or she may benefit from that contract.

## Conclusion

We described general advice a behavior analyst may consider when he or she is evaluating the ethical values of an organization during the job search process. We covered stages spanning initiation of the job search through contract negotiations. Our recommendations emphasize the importance of ethics and adherence to the BACB® Code throughout the job search and procurement process.

Inclusion of ethical considerations is important because behavior analysts benefit from working at an organization that possesses shared values and promotes behavior that aligns with the BACB® Code. Organizations that implement policy that adheres to the BACB® Code help a behavior analyst protect his or her professional credential from possible disciplinary action. Working for an ethical organization may also result in a better work environment (Ambrose et al., 2008) and the professional development of ethical behavior (Kio et al., 2017). Ultimately, improvements in ethical behavior may result in greater consumer protection and higher-quality behavior-analytic services (Brodhead & Higbee, 2012; Rogers et al., 1989).

In some cases, a behavior analyst may be considered for a job because he or she is being sought to improve the ethical values of an organization. If the behavior analyst is asked to improve the ethical culture of an organization, explicit discussion about assessment of the variables to change, how progress will be monitored, and the behavior analyst's individual role in the process would be helpful information to obtain during the interview process.

Also, it is very possible that great organizations will experience troubled times. If this occurs, conflict resolution strategies (see Bailey & Burch, 2016) would hopefully guide the behavior analyst during those periods. Furthermore, if issues are not resolved, lack of a non-compete clause in a behavior analyst's contract may allow him or her to change employers or relocate to avoid putting his or her credential at risk for disciplinary action.

The behavior analyst should take great care to understand the benefits and drawbacks of working for an organization (including those related to ethics) and consider how each benefit and drawback may weigh on the decision of whether to pursue employment at an organization. In some cases, a “red flag” may be an opportunity for a behavior analyst to make positive change within an organization. In other cases, information a behavior analyst identifies in a job interview may be concerning enough to avoid further pursuit of that position. Future researchers may consider developing and evaluating a process of decision-making to help behavior analysts evaluate the information they obtain during an interview. Such an evaluation, along with the development of additional discussion papers for early-career behavior analysts, may further enhance the professional behaviors of behavior analysts providing services to individuals with autism.

Our suggestions are meant to serve as a starting point for appraising the ethical values of an organization. They are not comprehensive. One limitation is that we have not empirically evaluated our suggestions; therefore, we are unaware of the extent to which they result in effective screening of ethical organizations. Because we have not empirically evaluated our suggestions, we recommend behavior analysts contact a trusted professional to help answer questions during the job search process. Finally, we recommend a behavior analyst obtains legal counsel if he or she seeks legal advice on any of the matters we discussed—especially for contract negotiations.

In summary, multiple variables should be considered when searching for a place of employment. We argue that organizational ethics should, at minimum, be considered within the job search process. Ethics is the umbrella under which clients receive the most effective treatment under the most competent behavior-analytic service delivery system that is available (Bailey & Burch, 2016).

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical Approval** This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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