

# RIGHT CITIZENSHIP, RIGHT GOVERNANCE

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Organizations - including governments - can be regarded, from a moral perspective, as nothing more than individual people arranged and trained to transform an apparently alien 'nature'. In undertaking this transformation, organizations take on a life of their own, lose direction, and begin to transform individual people and nature in unexpected and often harmful ways. So, from another perspective, organizations are greater than the sum of their individuals.

Organizations need to be accountable. **Accountability is a preparedness to explain and justify one's intentions, actions and omissions to stakeholders, and the means by which this preparedness is manifested.**

Unaccountable organizations set people against nature, people against people, and ultimately set each person against himself or herself. Harm to individual people, to society, to animals and plants, and to the physical environment is the inevitable result.

This Charter assumes a distinction between the employing organization and the individual person as employee and citizen. At the same time it represents a step towards breaking down this distinction. The Charter also acknowledges a creative tension between assuming the organizational status quo and challenging it.

## Three Fundamental Human Claims

Every human being has an inalienable right to accountable behaviour from organizations (whether public, private or independent) whose activities significantly affect their quality of life and that of future generations. Public officials and private sector directors and managers (whether of for-profit or non-profit organizations) have a duty to explain and justify their intentions, actions and omissions to all those whose quality of life is affected thereby.

All employees have a right to freedom of conscience and speech in the workplace. These rights and duties are not absolute, but are to be understood as strong presumptions in favor, and the onus is always on openly explaining and justifying any over-riding of them.

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## **1 TRANSPARENCY**

Those who run large organizations should behave as they would wish their employees and citizens to behave, with generosity and receptivity, on the following presumptions.

### **Openness**

That secrecy, concealment, prevarication and deviousness should be avoided. While the legitimate privacy of individuals should be respected, neither privacy nor confidentiality should be used as an excuse for unwarranted secrecy by those bestowed with authority.

### **Engagement**

That distancing and disengagement from the consequences of organizational behaviour (by means of bureaucratic size, intermediaries, technology, command structures, etc.) should be avoided, and steps should be taken to ensure as much engagement and closeness as possible with those who will or probably will face such consequences.

Smaller scale, delegation, regionalization, devolvement, partnerships, etc. are to be encouraged.

**Personal responsibility**

That discretion (judgement, creativity) is the prerogative of every individual person. Those who run large organizations must recognize and accept the especially weighty and momentous privilege they exercise as people who make decisions affecting the lives of other human beings, each of equal importance to themselves. They should not try to pass on that responsibility, nor should they try to hide behind rules, regulations, laws or the inadequacies of the organization's structures and processes.

The mark of a true leader in any organization is the willingness critically and objectively to question their own motives and interests and to reach a decision only after putting themselves and their loved ones in the position of those who will, in fact, be facing the consequences of their decision.

**Independence**

That an honest recognition of the tendency that nearly every individual person has to promote their own welfare at the expense of, or with the neglect of, the equally important welfare of others is of special importance to those bestowed with authority. Recognizing this, and to maintain the impartiality of their judgements, those in authority should accept limitations on their authority through the separation of powers, due process, appropriate standards of proof and other consensually accepted and transparent procedures designed to resolve or remove conflicts of interest.

**Non-discrimination**

That an honest recognition of the potential blind spot that every individual person has to their own prejudices, preferences, reactions and preconceptions is of special importance to those bestowed with authority. Recognizing this, those in authority will endeavor to treat each person – regardless of such factors as race, gender, disability, religion, age – as they would wish themselves and their loved ones to be treated.

Those bestowed with authority should be especially vigilant, in their intentions, judgements, acts and omissions, in examining their own motives and assumptions, listen to well-intentioned criticism and subject themselves to the same anti-discriminatory safeguards as every other person.

**Reconciliation**

That those bestowed with authority should personally apologize, and take action to make amends, reconcile, restore or repair, where their intentions, judgements, acts and omissions have resulted in harm to

other people, whether deliberately, negligently, unwittingly or by mistake.

One simple, if not sufficient, test of what is 'harmful' is whatever a person in authority would not wish to have happen to, or to have done to, themselves or their loved ones.

## 2 DUTY TO JUSTIFY

Those who run large organizations should provide explanations and justifications, with generosity and receptivity, on a presumption in favor of:

### **Right to know**

Those who face the consequences of the intentions, judgements, acts and omissions of people in authority have a qualified right to know of these intentions, judgements, acts and omissions. The presumption is always in favor of the public's right to know –the onus being on those bestowed with authority to explain any exception publicly.

### **Duty to inform**

The correlate of the public's right to know is the authority's duty to inform. Those bestowed with authority have personal responsibilities to inform the public, and to take necessary steps to empower their staff to inform the public. This is so wherever their intentions, judgements, acts and omissions will significantly affect the public or any individual persons.

Since individuals are unique, and implicit interests may be at stake, those in authority cannot (except in special circumstances, which they should justify) assume that they know what the public want to know.

### **Adequate information**

Those in authority should always provide the amount, kind and quality of information that the public and individual citizens need in order to evaluate the intentions, judgements, acts and omissions of those in authority.

In general, those in authority should actively provide information on anything that they themselves or their loved ones would want to know were they in the position of the public or the relevant individuals who are or might be affected.

Whether actively provided or passively made available, information should be of true value (or utility) to the recipient, and those in authority must ensure that this principle is understood and acted on

by those responsible for selecting, compiling, interpreting, writing up, editing and presenting the information. A measure of the value of information is the value to the authors and providers if they themselves or their loved ones were in the position of the public or the individuals who are or might be in need of such information. Information cannot be of true value if it brings more division and misunderstanding into the world.

### **Accessible information**

The information actively provided should be equally accessible to all without discrimination or unfair opportunity or inopportunity. Consideration needs to be given to such factors as language, disability, location and the means of individuals and communities. Information should also be timely. Information, other than that which should be actively provided, should be made available immediately on request, and the onus is on the authority to provide good reasons, publicly, if and when it is not available.

### **Communion**

Authorities should accept that the only reason that information is important is that achieving an understanding is fundamental in human relations. Those who are affected by the decisions of organizations wish to be understood, and wish to share their understanding of the situation. Authorities should be prepared to do what is necessary to achieve an understanding with stakeholders, and especially with aggrieved parties. Aspects of achieving an understanding are: acknowledging errors, meeting face to face, listening actively, accepting responsibility, showing concern, trying to identify with others, and apologizing as soon as possible when necessary.

### **Application**

The beneficial application of information is of paramount importance. Those bestowed with authority have the power, resources and opportunities to obtain information that the public and citizens may not have the expertise, opportunity, understanding or power to make use of, e.g. certain public health information.

While still endeavoring to meet the requirements of quantity, quality, accessibility, and value ... those in authority should apply, implement or act upon that information in the interest of the whole society as though that society were made up entirely of their loved ones.

### **3 FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE**

Public accountability is impossible unless all those who have a stake in the activities of the organization are allowed freedom of speech and conscience in relation to those activities.

#### **Consent**

Relations between stakeholders, including those bestowed with authority in organizations, should be guided by the principle of informed and voluntary consent. This is a recognition of the relative right of individuals to determine their own lives.

#### **Facilitation**

Stakeholders should be able, or enabled, to participate in significant decision-making through the removal of obstacles and impediments, and the organization should contribute significantly to the costs of facilitation, encouragement and support.

#### **Comprehension**

Stakeholders, including those bestowed with authority in organizations, should always endeavor to make themselves clearly and truthfully understood to each other and third parties by self-consciously negotiating and agreeing the terms of comprehensible discussion and involving independent third party intermediaries where necessary.

#### **Pluralism**

Different stakeholders, including those bestowed with authority in organizations, must explicitly recognize the plurality of interests, attitudes, motives and perspectives involved and establish at what points this plurality lends itself to consensus-building and at what point it is appropriate to recognize in an open-minded way any blockages which require compromise and impartial mediation.

#### **Participation**

Stakeholders have a right to participate in the decision-making of the organization. Participation may take different forms, such as consultation, representation and direct involvement, and the stronger the impact of the organization's activities on the stakeholders, the more direct (unmediated) that form should be. In general, organizations should aim for the strongest form of participation compatible with effective decision-making, and participation should not be abused as a means of prevarication and shedding or shifting of responsibility.

## **Raising concerns**

All stakeholders should be free to raise public concerns with impunity. This applies especially to conscientious employees within the organization. Those raising concerns have a duty to do so with responsibility and fairness, taking account of the real circumstances, and those in authority should be receptive to concerns, facilitate the reception of concerns, listen to the concerns and act upon them fairly and promptly.

## **USING THIS CHARTER**

Without a caring and compassionate attitude towards others, accountability and freedom of speech are worthless. Accountability and freedom of speech in the workplace are important because they are conditions for expressing and encouraging our care and compassion for each other and for ourselves. Without accountability and freedom of speech in the workplace, the freedom to care is denied.

Ethically, there is a presumption in favor of freedom of speech in the workplace. (The presumption should not be in favor of organizational secrecy.) Although it is not an absolute right, independent of actual circumstances, the onus is ethically always on showing why such a right should not be exercised in any particular situation.

‘Presumption in favor’ is about balance and avoiding extremes and absolutes. If there is a presumption in favor, for example, of freedom of speech, then in actual circumstances we start from that assumption (which shapes our general attitude) but remain alert to justifiable exceptions. There will always be exceptions, but one does not start with them; one has to argue for them with reason, fairness and evidence.

If you accept this Charter then you should use every opportunity to promote it and use it whenever those in authority are falling short in their public accountability. However, the Charter should be used on precisely the same foundations that it itself creates. It should not be used as an instrument of anger, blame, division, ideology, force, spite, or to gain anything other than improved human understanding and togetherness. When an authority falls short, you may consider taking the following steps:

- Get the facts right.
- Ask the authority for an explanation and justification.
- Consider the explanation, if it is provided.

- Evaluate the explanation fairly and send your evaluation together with this Charter to that authority.
- If you do not accept the explanation, or parts of it, inform the authority that this is the case and that you intend to engage in passive resistance to draw public attention to their lack of accountability.
- Provide constructive ideas, information and alternatives.
- Do not display anger, sarcasm, exaggeration or any form of abusiveness.
- Consider the appropriateness and consequences of taking any other steps of passive and peaceful (non-violent) resistance such as:
  - Creating alternatives and showing the way by modest example.
  - Peaceful withdrawal of labour.
  - Withholding of support.
  - Peaceful blockades.
  - Peaceful boycotts.
  - Non-compliance with selected rules, instructions, etc.
  - Disseminating clear and truthful information as far and wide as possible about the failure of accountability. This will include any explanation provided by the organization, your reasoned evaluation of that explanation, as well as what alternative behavior looks like.

We should always be mindful of our own behaviour. Aggression, division, discrimination, hatred, pride, dogmatism of any kind (verbal, emotional, physical) are counter-productive and not fruitful responses to organizational aggression, division, hatred and pride. Our human weaknesses can only be addressed by patiently giving our moral strengths a chance.

## GLOSSARY

### **Accountability**

Accountability is not to be understood merely in financial or legalistic terms, or even merely formal terms. It is a matter of attitude, and a certain culture of attitude is primarily what is being promoted here. Legal accountability may or may not help to promote such a culture. Fundamentally it is the willingness and preparedness to explain and justify one's intentions, acts and omissions to all those affected, even indirectly, by the consequences. It is also the processes by which such preparedness is manifested and made actual.

## **Employee**

An employee is one legally contracted to provide labour to another in exchange for certain benefits, such as wages or salary. We are using the term more broadly to cover the sense of terms such as 'worker' and 'professional', and we include all those who are not strictly employees, such as casual and temporary workers. However, our main sense of 'employee' depends on a somewhat fuzzy contrast with 'those in authority', although we recognize that high level managers and executives may also strictly speaking be employees.

## **Freedom of conscience and speech in the workplace**

There is a presumption in favor of freedom of speech in the workplace. (The presumption should not be in favor of organizational secrecy.) Although it is not an absolute right, independent of actual circumstances, the onus is always on showing why such a right should not be exercised in any particular situation.

## **The freedom to care**

Without a caring attitude towards others, accountability and freedom of speech are worthless. Accountability and freedom of speech in the workplace are important because they are conditions for expressing and encouraging our care and concern for each other and for ourselves. Without accountability and freedom of speech in the workplace, the freedom to care is denied.

## **Organization**

An organization is a group of people arranged to work towards a common objective with products and/or services. It includes private sector, public sector, and voluntary (independent) sector bodies as well as regulatory bodies and unions.

## **Presumption in favor**

This is about balance and avoiding extremes and absolutes. If there is a presumption in favor, for example, of freedom of speech, then in actual circumstances we start from that assumption (which shapes our general attitude) but remain alert to justifiable exceptions. There will always be exceptions, but one does not start with them; one has to argue for them with reason, fairness and evidence.

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