

# ETHICS IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

The behaviour that a business adheres to in its daily dealings with the world is the main point of discussion in this paper. It is suggest that management researchers face ethical issues of a different nature to those most frequently confronted by other social science researchers, and thus the paper enhances on more explicit acknowledgement of contextual factors involved in management research. The ethics of an organization may be discrete; however, ethics do not just apply to how the business communicates with the world, but also includes the business' one-on-one relations with individual research clients and employee's. The paper suggests the involvement of ethics codes, despite the risk that ethics codes may encourage instrumental compliance with minimal ethical obligations, we suggest they also have the potential to reflect a more aspirational agenda and that an ethics code could be used to formulate new ways of thinking about management research relationships. The development of an ethics code for management research should therefore be seen as a potentially worthwhile project.

**Keywords:** Management ethics, Management ethics code

## Introduction:

Ethical research questions are sometimes raised due to unclear behavioural expectations and moral responsibilities of the researchers who interact with respondents to collect and analyse marketing data and report findings to their clients. In fact, the rights and obligations of the researcher (or fieldworker), client, and the respondent are usually dictated by societal norms, which represent codes of behaviour, suggesting what members of the society ought to do under given circumstances. Certain ethical behaviour is normally expected from researchers when they deal with respondents. For example, an ethical issue is raised when a researcher believes he/she has the right to seek certain information, such as consumer income or spending on certain products, while a respondent feels that this is an invasion of privacy, thus does not respond to similar questions, or even refuses to participate in the whole survey.

However there are certain problems in the ethics issue in management research, such as, Writers differ widely on ethical issues in research, the perception varies to a much extent. There is often disagreement on what is and is not ethically acceptable in management research. also the main elements in the debate over ethical research have not changed for the approximately past fifty years. Various debates about research ethics emphasized certain extreme cases of alleged ethical transgression but the perception difference is ending it nowhere. Some cases of unethical research are often associated with particular research methods too; In fact, the ethical question resides particularly with the intentional misuse of these methods. The paper addresses the growing concern over violation of research ethics relating to rights of human subjects in fieldwork, notably the right to informed consent; right to privacy and confidentiality; and right not to be received or harmed as a result of participation in the research. It should be noted that these ethical areas can somehow overlap,

such as deceiving a respondent by not informing him/her about the true purpose of the research.

Nevertheless, the following areas may represent a useful classification to start the discussion.

### **1. The right to be informed (informed consent)**

The ethical issue involved in respondent's right to be informed varies, depending on whether the respondent is knowledgeable enough about the nature of research, and the implications of his/her participation in the survey. It means that a participant understands the purpose of the research, and consequently agreeing to participate in a survey.

The notion of informed consent also implies that a participant must be fully informed, presumably at the very beginning of an interview, about the survey process itself. The AOM (American Academy of Management) code of ethical conduct states that:

*"It is the duty of Academy members to preserve and protect the privacy, dignity, well-being, and freedom of research participants. This duty requires both careful research design and informed consent from all participants. Informed consent means explaining to potential participants the purpose and nature of research so they can freely choose whether or not to become involved. Such explanations include warning of possible harm and providing explicit opportunities to refuse to participate and to terminate participation at any time. Because students and employees are particularly subject to possible coercion, even when unintended, special care must be taken in obtaining their informed consent".*

### **2. Confidentiality and anonymity**

That is, an individual, who volunteers to participate in a survey, still has the right to expect his/her answers and identity to remain confidential and safeguarded. This implies that if respondent's personal details, such as name and address, are revealed to the researcher, this information should be safeguarded against use by the sponsoring organization, or even any third party, under any circumstances. Unfortunately, the principle of informed consent is often violated in research studies, presumably to maximize chances for obtaining critical information, avoid getting into certain problems, or gain access to certain kinds of settings. Critics argue that lack of informed consent may occur in cases where participants belong to certain groups in the society, such as the poor, the old, the less educated, who are often unaware of their rights to choose. They also argue that, in some cases, interviewers begin with unclear explanation of the purpose of the survey, followed by some attractive, yet irrelevant, questions to create a relaxing atmosphere, and then move to private questions. This seems to overlap between lack of informed consent and violation of privacy. Clearly, the above argument suggests violation of the "informed consent principle" can sometimes be justified in view of the importance and urgency to get the required information or access certain settings. However, this view seems to be dangerous as it neglects well-established academic tradition of keeping the public well-informed, and also does not seem to be universally accepted in management research.

### **3. Privacy and confidentiality**

Privacy is an area of ethical concern in every research. Individual's right to privacy is an ethical value in itself. It means that an individual has the right to choose whether to participate in a survey, or even respond to certain questions on whatever ground he/she feels is justified. Any transgression of this right in the name of research is not acceptable in the research community. Personal or seemingly intrusive information should never be solicited, and if it is absolutely necessary and linked to the nature of research, it should be dealt with high sensitivity to the respondent, offering enough justification for this information,

and linking it to the informed consent principle, giving an opportunity to withdraw. The MRS (Market Research Society) code of ethical conduct states that:

*"The objectives of any study do not give researchers a special right to intrude on a respondent's privacy nor to abandon normal respect for an individual's values."*

The MRS also recognizes that, although some research topics can be generally considered as sensitive to respondents, it is often difficult for researchers to judge beforehand which subjects can be sensitive to certain individuals. This suggests that generalization can not be made across the board, and that case sensitivity can be judged individually, offering respondents the right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, recording private behaviour with hidden devices (i.e a camera and/or microphone) is considered a gross violation of an individual's right to privacy (i.e. observing people in fitting rooms through a one-way mirror). The issue of privacy is always linked to confidentiality and anonymity in management research, particularly in the context of harm to participants. For example, the BSA (British Sociological Association) code of ethical conduct states that:

*"The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases, it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate to record certain kinds of sensitive information".*

#### **4. Deception and harm**

Deception and harm represent another area of ethical concern in marketing research. Deception occurs when the interviewer misrepresents the true purpose of research. In some cases, a researcher tries to create a false impression by disguising the real objective of the survey in order to obtain important information. Bluntly stated, the researcher lies to participants to obtain information he/she could not otherwise obtain. In this context, the AOM (Academy of Management) code of ethical conduct clearly states that:

*"Deception should be minimized, and, when necessary, the degree and effects must be mitigated as much as possible. Researchers should carefully weigh the gains achieved against the cost in human dignity. To the extent that concealment or deception is necessary, the researcher must provide a full and accurate explanation to participants at the conclusion of the study, including counselling, if appropriate".*

One very important issue to be enlighten is the **CLIENT ETHICS**, Like research suppliers, clients (or users) also have a number of ethical dos and don'ts. Some of the more common client problems are discussed under,

**Requesting Bids When a Supplier Has Been Predetermined:** is not uncommon for a client to prefer one research supplier over another. Such a preference may be due to a good working relationship, cost considerations, ability to make deadlines, friendship, or quality of the research staff. Having a preference per se is not unethical.

It is unethical, however, to predetermine which supplier will receive a contract and yet ask for proposals from other suppliers to satisfy corporate requirements. Requiring time, effort, and money from firms that have no opportunity to win the contract is very unfair.

#### **Requesting Bids to Obtain Free Advice and Methodology:**

Client companies seeking bargain basement prices have been known to solicit detailed proposals, including complete methodology and a sample questionnaire, from a number of

suppliers. After “picking the brains” of the suppliers, the client assembles a questionnaire and then contracts directly with field services to gather the data. A variation of this tactic is to go to the cheapest supplier with the client’s own proposal, derived by taking the best ideas from the other proposals. The client then attempts to get the supplier to conduct the more elaborate study at the lower price.

### **Making False Promises:**

Another technique used by unethical clients to lower their research costs is to hold out a nonexistent carrot. For example, a client might say, “I don’t want to promise anything, but we are planning a major stream of research in this area, and if you will give us a good price on this first study, we will make it up to you on the next one.” Unfortunately, the next one never comes—or if it does, the same line is used on another unsuspecting supplier.

### **Requesting Proposals without Authorization:**

In each of the following situations, a client representative sought proposals without first receiving the authority to allocate the funds to implement them:

1. A client representative decided to ask for proposals and *then* go to management to find out whether she could get the funds to carry them out.
2. A highly regarded employee made a proposal to management on the need for marketing research in a given area. Although managers were not too enthused about the idea, they told the researcher to seek bids so as not to dampen his interest or miss a potentially (but, in their view, highly unlikely) good idea.
3. A client representative and her management had different ideas on what the problem was and how it should be solved. The research supplier was not informed of the management view, and even though the proposal met the representative’s requirements, management rejected it out of hand.
4. Without consulting with the sales department, a client representative asked for a proposal on analysing present sales performance. Through fear of negative feedback, corporate politics, or lack of understanding of marketing research, the sales department blocked implementation of the proposal.

Management researchers have tended to rely instead on the ethical codes developed by other disciplines, such as the British Sociological Association, or by other related areas of professional practice, such as the Market Research Society. This begs the question as to whether the adoption of ethical principles from these other sources represents an adequate strategy for the development of an ethically grounded critical management research practice? Does the absence of an ethical code for management research reflect a valid attempt to resist methodological standardization? Does it represent an attempt to resist research professionalization? Or does the failure to engage in the debate required to develop such a code instead reflect a reluctance to engage in a more ethically grounded research practice? The Marketing Research Association (MRA) is the organization that is dedicated to promoting excellence in data collection. To this end, it recently enacted the following code of ethics:

### **Companies Engaged in Data Collection:**

1. Will treat the respondent with respect and not influence a respondent’s opinion or attitude on any issue through direct or indirect attempts, including the framing of questions.
2. Will conduct them in a professional manner and ensure privacy and confidentiality.
3. Will ensure that all formulas used during bidding and reporting during the data collection process conforms to the MRA/CASRO Incidence Guidelines.
4. Will make factually correct statements to secure cooperation and will honour promises made during the interview to respondents, whether verbal or written.



5. Will give respondents the opportunity to refuse to participate in the research when there is a possibility they may be identifiable even without the use of their name or address (e.g., because of the size of the population being sampled).
6. Will not use information to identify respondents without the permission of the respondent except to those who check the data or are involved in processing the data. If such permission is given, the interviewer must record it, or a respondent must do so, during all Internet studies, at the time the permission is secured.
7. Will adhere to and follow these principles when conducting online research:
  - \*Respondents' rights to anonymity *must* be safeguarded.
  - \*Unsolicited e-mail *must not* be sent to those requesting not to receive any further e-mail.
  - \*Researchers interviewing minors *must* adhere to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Before collecting, using, or disclosing personal information from a child, the researcher must obtain verifiable parental consent from the child's parent.
8. For Internet research, will not use any data in any way contrary to the provider's published privacy statement without permission from the respondent.
9. Will respect the respondent's right to withdraw or refuse to cooperate at any stage of the study and will not use any procedure or technique to coerce or imply that cooperation is obligatory.
10. Will obtain and document respondent consent when it is known that the personally identifiable information of the respondent may be passed by audio, video, or Interactive Voice Response to a third party for legal or other purposes.
11. Will obtain permission and document consent of a parent, legal guardian, or responsible guardian before interviewing children 13 years of age or younger. Prior to obtaining permission, the interviewer should divulge the subject matter, length of interview, and other special tasks that may be required of the respondent.
12. Will ensure that all interviewers comply with any laws or regulations that may be applicable when contacting or communicating to any minor (18 years old or younger) regardless of the technology or methodology utilized.
13. Will not reveal any information that could be used to identify clients without their written authorization.
14. Will ensure that companies, their employees, and subcontractors involved in the data-collection process adhere to reasonable precautions so that multiple surveys are not conducted at the same time with a specific respondent without explicit permission from the sponsoring company or companies.
15. Will consider all research materials provided by the client or generated as a result of materials provided by the client to be the property of the client. These materials will not be disseminated or disposed of without the verbal or written permission of the client.
16. Will, as time and availability permit, give their client the opportunity to monitor studies in progress to ensure research quality.
17. Will not represent a no research activity to be opinion and marketing research, such as: the compilation of lists, registers, or data banks of names and addresses for any no research purposes (e.g., canvassing or fund raising). Industrial, commercial, or any other form of espionage. The acquisition of information for use by credit rating services or similar organizations.

Moreover, as attempts are made to develop professional ethical codes that span the boundaries of socio-economic research, is there an additional danger that these debates become increasingly remote from the ethical considerations that may be specific to management research? Thus there needs to have a greater willingness to treat ethical issues as part of a broader set of values that influence the research process. However, consideration of

ethical issues involved in management studies is notably absent from recent attempts. The argument put forward in this piece is that this represents an omission.

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