

Research ethics

The consideration of ethics in research and in general business for that matter is of growing importance it is therefore critical but you understand the basics of ethical research and how this might affect your research project. This is especially important if your research involves interaction with businesses or members of the general community who serve as participants (respondents) in your research. There are a range of interactions in your research that might include might occur including in depth interviews call my focus groups, surveys or even observing at people behaviour.

All researchers student professional or academic are well intentioned there is a possibility that interaction with participants may even inadvertently harm them in some intended way. This could include:

- Psychological harm for example research in the use of nudity in advertising may show participants images that offend them
- Financial harm researching unethical behaviour within a given firm may provide management with information on individual employees that results in an individual getting fired. Or undertaking industry-based research may inadvertently share sensitive information with the firms competitors resulting in financial harm to the organization.
- Social harm researching how lifestyle affects consumption may unintentionally disclose a person sexual orientation when that person wanted to keep this confidential

It is your responsibility to consider whether any type of harm could occur when you plan research and to ensure that mechanisms are instituted to remove it. It is therefore essential that you carefully evaluate the potential for harm to arise and ensure that you:

- Behave according to appropriate ethical standards
- Consider how you research might negatively affect participants
- Protect yourself your supervisors and your institution from being placed in situations in which individuals could make claims of inappropriate behaviour resulting in public criticisms or even you being sued.

Unfortunately there is an increasing amount of litigation in the world in many universities of process is in place for vetting research to ensure that its undertaking in an ethical fashion. This ensures that the participant is protected and also ensures that the students staff and University undertaking the research are protected.

In covering the topic of ethics are we are not trying to change your values but rather I want to make you more aware of potential ethical issues that might arise when you're undertaking your research. To do this some questions will be asked that if appropriately answered would ensure that potential ethical problems are avoided so we need to look at a range of ethical issues. Many of these issues are broadly covered in the various business and marketing ethics texts you can for example look at Smith and Quelch (1992) as well as marketing research text, for example Churchill (1991). These texts tend to look at research ethics from a client agency perspective that is where the researchers working for a client. So I want in the following at session to try to broaden this view by also considering general social research ethics covering a range of data collection approaches and certainly including surveys and interviews.

What is human intervention

Human intervention is defined to encompass a broad range of activities including interviews, review of corporate records, focus groups, experiments, oral histories or surveys it basically involves the researcher having access to information that is not in the public domain. If your research involves accessing information that is readily and publicly available such as a content analysis of websites and meta analysis or a literature review, it is unlikely that much of the material discussed you know following on today will apply to all types of research. Some examples of student research that would be less likely to involve human intervention would include the following;

- Content analysis of information contained in advertisements
- Multiple regression study that uses data from publicly available databases
- An examination of a data set that was collected for another purpose assuming that the participants had already given their prior permission other researchers access this data.

Codes of ethical conduct/codes of practice

There are various ethical codes of conduct that regulate researchers' behaviour. These codes discuss many issues that potentially might arise in your research as well as other issues associated with professional practice. For example the American marketing Association Code of Conduct touches on research related issues and specifically states that members must not knowingly do harm. It also specifies other issues of particular interest to professional marketers such as the issues relating to the development safety products or the prohibition of price fixing activities ET cetera ET cetera.

Ethical issues are also examined by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research is code of practice which sets out researchers broad responsibilities. ESOMR provides more detailed codes and guidelines for a range of different activities ranging from broad based activities such as guide to opinion polls to more specific guidelines on mystery shopping and interviewing children. The codes are of course not static there are also specific detailed discussions of ethical practice relating to new technologies such as AI.

Ethical guidelines are not limited to the marketing discipline. Of course psychologists have detailed guidelines regulating research involving human intervention so the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Codes of Conduct covers a diverse range of research issues many of which relate to business research as well. For example, there is a whole section with privacy and confidentiality used to be in Section 4 of the APA which is short for the American Psychological Association, you need to get hold of an the most up to date at copy of that at shortly.

Many universities have also developed guidelines after conducting ethical research. In Australia all universities have agreed to have all research complied with one set of ethical guidelines for all types of human intervention. These guidelines were developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council NHMRC and applied to all types of research. In addition to the guidelines the NHMRC also produced the Human Research Ethics Handbook which is the primary guideline for ethics committees and researchers alike. Within most universities researchers, students and staff must complete a detailed application which is reviewed by an independent ethics committee before research can be undertaken. These committees apply basic ethical principles to all research and seek to ensure that ethical issues are considered and appropriately addressed. Though not all the issues in every code of practice will apply to your research reviewing. These codes will give you some idea of the complexity of the issues that need to be addressed when planning your research project some of these issues are my hopefully will describe later.

Ethical philosophies

Within the ethics discipline, there are a number of different approaches for examining ethics and values. Two philosophical approaches that relate closely to the discussion of student research ethics or deontology and teleology or deontological and teleological philosophies. To assist you in getting a better understanding of where harm may arise and number of approaches, I'm going to discuss.

According to Skinner Farrell and Dubinsky (1988) deontological philosophies focus on the factors or means used to arrive at an ethical decision. These philosophies emphasised moral obligations or commitments that should be binding or necessary for proper conduct you can see this on page 213. To put it quite simply a deontological approach means that you should not harm participants in anyway no matter what the potential benefit. On the other hand, teleological philosophies emphasised the consequences result from an action. In other words, they deal with the moral worth of the behaviour is determined totally by the consequences of the behaviour. This approach asks you to evaluate whether the benefits of the research outweigh the cost to participants, if so the research would be considered to be acceptable.

A teleological approach is frequently used in medical research where the research needs to weigh up the potential harm to participants versus the harm from them not participating. For example, when testing a new drug, it is determined that there is a 0.01% chance of some negative side effect occurring but the chances of getting the disease the drug is trying to prevent is substantially higher 10% of the population will get it. Thus the potential harm from the research is outweighed by the potential benefit of the research. It is suggested that teleological approach is inappropriate for your research as you and other students would be unskilled in weighing up the associated costs and benefits.

Alternative ethical perspectives are also put forward in the ethics literature. For example Kantian ethics suggest that person should be treated as ends and never purely as means. This any practice you might want to undertake the does not consider how the situation affects the individual would be unethical. This is more stringent perspective than a deontological approach as an individual would not have to be harm for a breach of the Kantian perspective to occur. Other ethical perspectives are put forward commonly include morality theory wrote theory virtue ethics feminist theories and ethics of care but I'm not going to discuss out here the less frequently applied in research associated with business. Anyway if you're interesting please look at Beauchamp and Bowie 1997 for full discussion of these. For our discussion of research methods in relation to your project a deontological approach should be adopted that is any practice that causes harm to an individual will be avoided.

Ethical philosophies

The goal of your research project your thesis is to facilitate your learning through a better understanding of research and how it influences practice. However in undertaking your research you will frequently be required to seek information from individuals who are not normally part of the educational process for example the average consumer managers employees. You will need to ensure that no harm occur occurs to these voluntary participants in the all participants have made the decision to assist you with the full information as to what is required and what if any potential negative consequences may arise from such participation. Those who choose to not participate must also be given the same information on which to make the decision not to be involved.

There are a diverse range of research methods and research context potentially available to each and everyone of you and each one carries its own specific ethical considerations which makes it

difficult to provide one global set of ethical issues. It would be impossible to construct a composite list of all potential problems I do want you to put together working in with each other but a list of potential ethical problems relating to research and consumers. Lists not have to be comprehensive and then we will compare similar lists with each other in each group and also is this same less going to be useful for research with employees or managers. There are 6 broad ethical areas that need to be considered in your research;

- voluntary participation
- informed consent
- confidentiality
- anonymity
- the potential for harm communicating the results
- and more specific ethical issues.

These six areas are interdependent and as such the following discussions will overlap quite a bit. It should be emphasised that you need to check whether your university, or those who are working in universities your organization that you work with or work in or want to work with house processes or procedures that must be followed and that may differ from those described by me. You should also identify the relevant deadlines for presenting any required documentation to the ethics committees at. So there are sections following that will hopefully help you understand ethical issues associated with each area and provide some process for addressing issues if they do arise.