5

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"You will need to ensure that no harm occurs."

The consideration of ethics in research, as well as business, is of growing importance. For example, ethical issues in business associated with high profile companies such as Enron, Arthur Andersen, and WorldCom have raised attention from the public, policy makers, business practitioners, and universities (Nill & Schibrowsky, 2005; Singhapakdi, 2004). In fact, even breaches of academic integrity have been publicized recently (Bhattacharjee, 2013). It is, therefore, critical that you understand the basics of ethical research and how this might affect your research project. Research ethics is more than simply filling out forms; it is undertaking research in a way that does no harm but also relates to how one communicates the information in regard to results and how one interprets the information on which ideas are developed (i.e., reflect the literature accurately). As such, ethical issues need to be considered throughout a business research project's development, implementation, and communication of results. Research ethics is, therefore, much more than completing an ethics application or institutional review form. However, many of the issues that will be discussed do relate to protecting those whose data you use (i.e., research participants). This is especially important if your research involves interaction with businesses or includes members of the general community, managers, or employees who serve as research participants (i.e., respondents). You might interact with people in a number of ways, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, or even observing people's behavior.

Though all researchers (student, professional, or academic) are well intentioned, there is sometimes the possibility

that interactions with participants may inadvertently harm them in some unintended way. This could include these types of harm:

- *Psychological harm*. For example, researching the use of nudity in advertising may show participants images that offend them.
- *Financial harm*. Researching unethical behavior 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 result in sharing sensitive information with a firm's competitors, causing financial harm to the organization.
- *Social harm*. Researching how lifestyle affects consumption may unintentionally disclose a person's sexual orientation when that person wanted to keep this confidential.

It is your responsibility to consider whether any type of harm could occur as part of your research. You need to ensure that mechanisms can be instituted to remove any potential harm arising. It is, therefore, essential that you carefully evaluate the *potential* for harm to arise and ensure that you (a) behave according to appropriate ethical standards; (b) consider how your research *might* negatively affect participants; and (c) report results appropriately, which will protect you, your professors, and your university from being placed in situations in which individuals could make claims of unethical behavior, resulting in public criticism or even your being sued.

Unfortunately, there is an increasing amount of litigation in the world, and many universities appropriately have processes in place for vetting research to ensure that it is undertaken in an ethical fashion, preventing any harm to participants from arising. In different countries, these may be referred to as institutional review boards (i.e., IRBs), ethics committees, or human research ethic committees (HRECs). While these were originally established to ensure that medical research was undertaken ethically, they have been broadened to cover all types of research, including business (Doyle, Mullins, & Cunningham, 2010). Getting works vetted, or approved, by these committees ensures that the participant is protected and also ensures that the students, staff, and university undertaking the research are protected. Remember, participants are doing you a favor by participating. The process also generally enhances the quality of research as well, ensuring it is well designed and implemented.

In covering the topic of ethics, we are not trying to change your values, but rather, we want to make you more aware of potential ethical issues that might arise when planning, undertaking, and reporting on your research. To do this, some questions will be asked that, if appropriately answered, will ensure that potential ethical problems in the research process are avoided and often will also improve the work as well. Thinking about these issues requires that you step outside your shoes as a researcher and consider the research process from the community or participants' perspective, those you are asking to assist you or those your work will affect.

This chapter is designed to discuss a range of ethical issues in the undertaking and reporting of your research. Many of these issues are broadly covered in the various business and marketing ethics texts (for example, Eagle & Dahl,

Table 5.1 Institutional Review Boards and Ethics Committees	
"What Is an IRB?" (3:52 [min:s])	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPWY0hmCR2I
"What Is the IRB?" (2:05)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d15kYGwYU24
"Research Ethics Involving Human Subjects" (9:38)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O5gsF5oyIs
Doyle et al. (2010). "Research Ethics in a Business School Context: The Establishment of a Review Committee and the Primary Issues of Concern." *Journal of Academic Ethics, 8*(1), pp. 43–66.	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10805-010-9108-x

2015) as well as marketing research texts (for example, Iacobucci & Churchill, 2009), business research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and texts focused on research ethics more widely (Israel & Hay, 2006). Some of these materials look at research ethics from a client-agency perspective—that is, where the researcher is working for a client. In this chapter, we take a broad view of research ethics and incorporate general social research ethics (Homan, 1991), covering a range of data collection approaches such as participant observation (Bulmer, 1982) and surveys or experiments (Sieber, 1982).

Student Example

On the website (http://polonskywaller.com/), there is an interview with students discussing research ethics within their project.

WHAT IS HUMAN INTERVENTION?

In the context of this chapter, human intervention is defined to encompass a broad range of activities, including interviews, review of corporate records, focus groups, experiments, oral histories, surveys, or observing people's communication and behavior, including on the web. 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 publicly available, such as a content analysis of magazines, meta-analysis (a review of existing research), or literature review, it is unlikely that you will need to apply for ethics approval, and some of the topics may be less relevant—although some universities' IRBs and HRECs might still require you to have approval even for these other kinds of research. Of course, researchers undertaking all types of research will need to consider issues such as academic fraud and plagiarism.

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 on television
- A multiple-regression study that uses data from publicly available databases, such as Predicast or Dow Jones
- An examination of a data set that was collected for another purpose (which then becomes secondary data), assuming that the participants had already given their prior permission for other researchers to access these data

As with all issues in this book, what is acceptable research practice will vary by country and by university. For example, some universities require that within some degrees students must be a participant in research of other students, referred to as a "Student Research Pool," whereas this practice would not be allowed in other universities. Thus, while we refer to a range of research activities within this chapter, you need to check to see what your university allows or excludes within student research.

CODES OF ETHICAL CONDUCT/PRACTICE

There are various ethical codes of conduct that regulate researchers' behavior (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) within all business disciplines. These codes discuss many issues that potentially might arise in your research, as well as other issues associated with professional practice (Arnold, Beauchamp, & Bowie, 2013). For example, the American Marketing Association's statement of ethics (AMA, 2009) touches on research-related issues and specifically states that members must "do no harm." It also specifies other issues of particular interest to professional marketers, such as the issues relating to the development of safe new products or the prohibition of price-fixing activities, interacting with stakeholders, and so forth.

Ethical issues are also examined by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research's (ESOMAR, 2009) code of practice, which sets out researchers' broad responsibilities. ESOMAR provides more detailed codes and guidelines for a range of different research activities, from broad-based activities such as *Guide to Opinion Polls* to more specific guidelines on mystery shopping and interviewing children (ESOMAR, 2009). These codes are, of course, not static, and there are also specific detailed discussions of ethical practice relating to newer technologies such as the Internet (AMA, 2009; ESOMAR, 2009). We will briefly discuss the use of the Internet in research in regard to ethical issues later in the section, as this raises some new issues.

Ethical guidelines are not limited to the marketing discipline, as psychologists also have detailed guidelines regulating research involving human intervention. The American Psychological Association's (APA, 2017) detailed guide *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* covers a diverse range of research issues, many of which relate to business research as well. For example, the APA code includes a whole section dealing with privacy and confidentiality.

Thus, no matter your specific discipline, there will most likely be an appropriate ethical code of practice that will govern behavior, including research activities within your area.

Most universities have also developed guidelines for conducting ethical research (Polonsky, 1998). In many countries, these may be based on some nationally agreed on standard. For example, in Australia, all universities' ethics processes in regard to human intervention across disciplines are based on guidelines developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2013).

Within most universities, researchers, students, and staff must complete detailed applications to be reviewed by their IRB or HREC before research can be undertaken (Polonsky, 1998). The online resources for this book contain an example of one ethics application and associated materials that were used to undertake a real research project, and these are linked to the case used throughout the book.

All ethics committees or institutional review boards apply basic ethical principles to all research and seek to ensure that all ethical issues are considered and appropriately addressed. Not all the issues in every code of practice will apply to your research, but having an understanding of what is included in your specific discipline's code of conduct, as well as your university's ethical code of practice, will give you some idea of the complexity of the issues that need to be addressed when planning your research project. The process of receiving ethical approval is a core part of the research process and needs to be integrated into your project planning, and ethical issues need to be considered throughout your project. Some of the issues associated with the evaluation of project ethics will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

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 are deontological and teleological philosophies, which also guide ethical decisions made by business managers. To assist you in getting a better understanding of where harm may arise, a number of approaches will be briefly discussed.

According to Skinner, Ferrell, and Dubinsky (1988), "deontological philosophies focus on the *factors* or *means* used to arrive at an ethical decision. These philosophies emphasize moral obligations or commitments that should be binding or necessary for proper conduct" (p. 213). To put it quite simply, a deontological approach means that you should *not* harm participants in any way, no matter what is the potential benefit. On the other hand, "teleological philosophies emphasize the *consequences* that result from an action. In other words, they deal with the moral worth of the behavior as determined totally by the consequences of the behavior" (p. 213). This approach asks you to evaluate whether the benefits of your research would outweigh the cost to participants (or society more widely); if so, the research would be considered acceptable.

A teleological approach is frequently used in medical research, where the research needs to weigh the potential harm to participants versus the harm

from them not participating. Given the potential harm associated with medical research, this explains why a more rigorous ethics process is applied within the medical field. For example, when testing a new drug, it is determined that there is a 0.01% chance of some negative side effect occurring (which could include death), but the chances of getting the disease the drug is trying to prevent is substantially higher (e.g., 10.0%). Thus, the potential harm from the research is outweighed by the potential benefit of the research, especially if it assists in finding a cure for the illness. Of course, there is also the chance that some people will be worse off from the medicine, and this would need to be clearly explained to potential research participants. A teleological approach is generally inappropriate for most student work, and possibly even most business research, as you and other students would be unskilled in weighing the associated costs and benefits, and possibly more importantly, the focus of student research is generally on learning about the research process rather than the sustentative outcomes of the research.

Alternative ethical perspectives have also been put forward in the ethics literature. For example, Kantian ethics suggest that "persons should be treated as ends and never purely as means" (Arnold et al., 2013, p. 22). Thus, any practice you might want to undertake that does not consider how the research could affect the participant would be unethical. This is a more stringent perspective than a deontological approach, as an individual would not necessarily have to be harmed for a breach of the Kantian perspective to occur. Other ethical perspectives put forward include common morality theory, rights theory, virtue ethics, feminist theories, and ethics of care, but these will not be discussed here, as they are less frequently applied in research associated with business practices (see Arnold et al., 2013, for a discussion of these). For the discussion of research ethics in relation to your project, we, therefore, adopt a deontological approach; that is, any practice that causes any harm to an individual should be avoided.

ETHICAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER

The goal of your research project 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 (e.g., average consumers, managers, employees, etc.). You will need to ensure that no harm occurs to these voluntary participants and that all participants have made an informed and voluntary decision to assist you with full information as to what is required *and* what, if any, potential negative consequences may arise from such participation. Those who choose not to participate must also be given the same information on which to make their decision not to be involved and should not be disadvantaged by not participating.

There are a diverse range of research methods and research contexts potentially available to you, and each 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. For example, Table 5.2 lists a set of potential ethical problems relating to researching

consumers. This listing is not comprehensive, and similar lists could be developed in relation to research involving employees or managers.

There are six broad ethical areas related to participants that need to be considered in your research. In this chapter, we will discuss voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, the potential for harm, communicating the results, and more specific ethical issues. These six areas are interdependent and would arise at various stages in the research, and as such, the following discussions will overlap a bit. It should be emphasized that you need to check whether your university has processes or procedures that must be followed and that may differ from those described here, and these will possibly highlight other issues for consideration. It is also ***very important*** that you identify the relevant deadlines for presenting any required documentation to the Ethics Committee, HREC, or IRB at your university. Your research cannot really begin (i.e., you can't collect data) without first receiving ethics approval. We have seen a number of student projects held up because students did not consider the ethics process within their planning.

The discussions in the following subsections are designed to ensure that you understand the ethical issues associated with each area as well as provide some processes for addressing the issues if they arise.

Table 5.2 Potential Ethical Problems Relating to Researching Consumers

Ethical Issue	Right Violated	Compensation Available
Preserving participants' anonymity	Right to privacy	
Exposing participants to mental stress	Right to safety	Right to be heard Right to redress
Use of special equipment and techniques	Right to privacy Right to choose	Right to redress
Involving participants in research without their knowledge	Right to be informed Right to privacy	Right to redress
Use of deception	Right to be informed	Right to be heard Right to redress
Use of coercion	Right to choose	
Selling under the guise of research	Right to be informed	
Causing embarrassment, hindrance, or offense	Right to respect	Right to redress

Source: Smith and Quelch (1992, p. 162).

Table 5.3 Video Links to Material Overviewing Research Ethics	
"Ethics in Research" (3:40 [min:s])	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDzS6T1k7Zk
"Research Ethics" (1.04:14)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ir3VvYNzHeM
"Research Ethics for Undergraduate Students" (7:52)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8ANF9uRejk
"The Ethics of Social Research. Part 3 of 3 on Practical Issues and Ethics" (13:22)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQeUuxIzsfU

Voluntary Participation

Participation in *all* research should be voluntary, and there should be no coercion or deception (these latter issues will be discussed in the subsections titled "Informed Consent" and "Other, More Specific Ethical Issues"). For the most part, you should not be in a position to force or pressure respondents to participate, but there are some situations in which this could potentially occur. You should remember that participants are assisting you, and they should be *invited* to participate, with a clear understanding that they are under no obligation to do so and that there will be no negative consequences for them if they do not assist you in your research. Remember, those who are participating are generally doing you a favor!

The potential for coercion varies depending on whom you are seeking assistance from. For example, if you are undertaking an intercept-type activity involving surveying fellow students in the university parking lot, it is unlikely that potential participants would be unduly pressured by your asking for a few minutes of their time. This assumes that you do not hound them until they agree to participate. However, even when you deal with peers, there is a slight potential for coercion to occur, as you might exaggerate the importance of participants' assistance or of the study. For example, you might say something like, "I need you to fill out this survey or I will fail Subject X." Such a statement would be inappropriate, as it places unnecessary social pressure on potential respondents.

In some circumstances, the target sample group might have unique characteristics or needs, and if this were the case, they would require special treatment. For example, consider the case in which a student was undertaking research involving a group with limited English capabilities. In this situation, respondents might not understand what they are being asked to do and, equally important, might not understand that the activity is voluntary (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012; Davidson, 1995). Thus, you should ensure that any vulnerable groups are protected, even from unintentional harm. The difficulty in demonstrating informed consent may be one reason that people with limited English are often explicitly excluded from research (A. Renzaho, Renzaho, & Polonsky, 2012).

In particular, you should be aware that ethics committees and IRBs are generally very concerned about student researchers interacting with children, as children may see "requests" by adults to have some greater authority, and this is why if you do want to research children, you will always need to get their parents' consent first (although the age required for parental consent in research will vary across countries)! Getting parental consent is important and does add another step in the research process that needs to be considered when establishing timetables for your work.

The issue of voluntary consent can also arise when students undertake research of employees within an organization. This might occur if you were to ask for a firm to allow you to research the organization's activities and/or employees, and it is especially of concern when you research your own workplace. In these situations, it should be made clear to participants (a) that the organization has allowed you to investigate the specified activities in your workplace; (b) that any involvement is voluntary; (c) that there is no penalty for not participating; and (d) whether specific information from the research will or will not be given to their employer.

Confidentiality and anonymity are potentially even more important when you are researching other staff within your own organization. How can you, who may be in a managerial position, indicate to participants that they will not be harmed if they don't participate in the study? They may still feel pressured as you are their manager. One way to overcome this potential problem is to separate yourself from respondents, so that responses are confidential or anonymous. For example, in a group project, it might be possible for a member of the group who is not affiliated with the firm to collect and code the data. It would then be impossible for you to know who participated.

Even in an individual project, protecting the anonymity of colleagues could exist, for example, if you were to undertake an online survey and thus would not have details of who participated. Another solution might be to have the organization distribute the surveys; then, have employees post the completed surveys to you anonymously. In this way, neither you nor the firm can identify who participated. For other data collection techniques, there are other approaches for addressing the confidentiality issue. For example, if you want to conduct interviews with employees, the organization could write to employees and invite them to contact you or simply show up at a predetermined appointment. However, if you work within the firm, you would potentially be likely to be able to identify the individual. As will be discussed in other subsections, knowing the people who participated is not necessarily problematic if the participants know this is the case and agree to this, but it does still need to be considered, and participants may need to still be protected.

Informed Consent

Another important issue in student research involving human intervention is to ensure that potential participants fully understand what they are being asked to do and that they are informed if there are any potential negative consequences of such participation (Nelson et al., 2011). The most effective way to address the informed consent issue is through the use of an information sheet (sometimes

Table 5.4 Web Links to Sites Containing Information Sheets and Consent Forms	
Calvin College—Three alternative structures provided	https://calvin.edu/offices-services/institutional-review-board/informed-consent-checklist/index.html
Michigan Technological University—Multiple examples	http://www.mtu.edu/research/administration/integrity-compliance/review-boards/human-subjects/consent_forms.html
Oxford Brooks—Principles and examples	http://www.brookes.ac.uk/Research/Research-ethics/Guidelines-for-informed-consent/

called a plain language sheet), which is provided to all those who are invited to participate. If possible, the information sheet should be on official university letterhead, as this has been shown not only to increase the response rate but also to inform respondents that this is an official university activity. In situations in which there *is* a potential for participant harm to occur, participants should be given the invitation well in advance to enable them to carefully consider whether they will participate before they are then asked to undertake any research.

Exhibit 5.1 provides a sample information sheet as well as a range of alternative information that could be included depending on the type of research involved. Table 5.4 provides some links to university materials that provide sample information sheets and consent forms, and a copy of one used for a survey and focus group is also included on the online materials linked to this book. It is important that the information included be sufficiently clear so that your target group can understand what they are being asked to do. The level of complexity will vary based on the project and targeted respondent. For example, you may need to describe the study differently if you are examining CEOs than if the participants are high school students.

What information should be included in the information letter? The issues should be sufficient for individuals to make an informed decision as to whether they want to participate. The letter should tell them who you are and why you are doing the project. For example, "I am an information science student at University X, and I am undertaking a research project as part of a systems design course, being delivered by Professor Z."

The letter should also tell participants what the project is about and the desired outcomes. For example, "This project is designed to examine human resource managers' attitudes toward the outsourcing of recruitment, to see if they believe that these services are effective." There should also be a brief discussion of how and why the participants were selected. For example, "For this study, we are interested in the views of local accountants and have contacted the managers of all firms listed in the local yellow pages under *accountants*."

Once you have explained who you are, and broadly what you are doing and why, it is essential that you explain what you are asking them to do.

For example, "We would like you to complete the attached survey, which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and is being administered with the permission of your firm. When finished, you can place the survey in the collection box in the lunchroom." *If* information is being distributed back to an organization, it is important that this is clearly stated. For example, "We will be providing the finance manager with a copy of the final report and will be quoting individuals who have given us permission to do so." In this way, individuals can hopefully identify the negative implications of participation, which should be explicitly stated if negative consequences exist. For example, "Though we will not quote individual respondents, given the focus of the research and small number of respondents, it may be possible that individuals could be identified by their comments." A statement such as this clearly identifies that some harm *could possibly* arise depending on the topic. There are other situations in which respondents might need to be warned about the focus of the study. For example, "We will be showing participants copies of advertisements containing female nudity similar to those in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. If you are offended by such advertisements, you may want to decline participation." In this latter case, the students have explicitly tried to protect the respondent from the potential of harm.

The information sheet should also discuss how respondents would be provided feedback, if at all. It should also include contact details of your supervisor(s). In all instances, you should include a complaints mechanism, although this will vary by university and may or may not be required (see the bottom of Exhibit 5.1). Last, though this is not an ethical issue, students should not forget to provide a deadline for responding, as this ensures they get the information requested in a timely fashion.

Table 5.5 Information Sheets

Information sheets should include these items:
• Who is doing the research
• Where you are from
• Why you are doing the research
• Who is the supervisor
• How they were selected to participate
• What they need to do and how long it will take
• What the potential for harm is (or how they will be disadvantaged if they don't participate)
• Whether their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected
• What happens to the data and any report
• How they will be informed of the results

EXHIBIT 5.1

Example of an Information Sheet

<Italic material should be filled in for the specific project.>

<UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD>

<Supervisor's/Lecturer's

Contact Details>

Dear Potential Participant,

As part of *<SUBJECT X>* I/We am/are undertaking a research project titled *<TITLE>*. The project examines *<1 or 2 sentences describing what the project is about and outcomes>*. *<Explain why they were chosen and how>*.

I/We would like you to *<1 or 2 sentences explaining what you want them to do>*. This will take approximately *<X minutes>*. Your participation is completely voluntary [for employees of an organization it would be beneficial to inform them that this was achieved], and there will be no negative consequences to you for not participating.

[If there are audio or videotapes of interviews, it might be appropriate to allow participants to review tapes or transcripts. If you use these, it is also beneficial to say:] During the interview, you will have the opportunity to edit the tape and/or stop the interview at any time. Prior to beginning the interview, I/we will ask you to sign a consent form.

[If using a survey you can say:] Please return the survey to *<Name of person collecting responses>* by *<Date>*. Your completion and return of the survey is taken as an indication of your consent to participate.

[You can also say (more than one may be applicable):]

1. I/We will be providing <X> with a copy of the final report; however, data will be aggregated such that individuals cannot be identified.
2. I/We will be providing <X> with a copy of the report and will be quoting individual comments with your permission.
3. I/We will be providing a copy of the results to your organization, which will make the results available to you.
4. If you would like a summary of results, they will be available from my/our supervisor after *<Date>*.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. If you have any questions in relation to my/our study, please contact my/our supervisor at the above address.

[ALL Students Sign.]

[Your university may also require you to include a complaints mechanism, such as the following:]

The university requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which research is conducted, they may direct it to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, they can contact *<X at Phone and Address>*.

For examples of information letters used in the sample projects, refer to

Honors Thesis 1: "VTAC Change of Preference," pages 105–107 (http://polonskywaller.com/)

Honors Thesis 2: "Game, Set, Match," pages 135–136 (http://polonskywaller.com/)

Fair Trade example "Information Sheet" for survey and focus group (http://polonskywaller.com/)

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Within the information sheet, you may have mentioned that you will keep respondents' answers confidential and/or anonymous. These issues have been mentioned earlier, but they need to be discussed further, as many students confuse the two concepts.

Anonymity requires that you do not know who the participants are. This could be achieved through random phone surveying or having an organization distribute a survey on behalf of the student to all employees or customers. *Confidentiality* means that you know who the participants are, but that their identity or response will not be revealed in any way in the resulting report. Confidentiality is very important especially when you are examining situations within a firm in which you will give managers a copy of the report. It could also be important when undertaking an industry-based study, and the final report will be distributed to all participants, who may be competitors.

You must consider how you will protect participants, and if there is any possibility that they will not be protected, this must be clearly stated to potential respondents in the accompanying information letters and consent forms (discussed in more detail later in this chapter). If individuals clearly know they will be identified and that the report will be distributed to managers or competitors, there is no ethical problem associated, as long as participants have made an informed decision to participate in the research knowing this is the case.

There are several ways that anonymity and confidentially can be protected. If the researcher does not know who replies, individual confidentiality and anonymity are usually protected. However, it may be possible that individuals could still be identified based on the level of analysis. For example, how many 45-year-old female senior managers in the Finance Department are there within one organization? If the answer is one, then that individual *could* be identified if the analysis is too detailed. Therefore, you need to be careful as to how detailed and/or segmented your data are, and this fact needs to be included in your information sheet.

Potential for Harm

There are a number of ways in which participants can be harmed: physical harm, psychological harm, emotional harm, embarrassment (i.e., social harm), and so on. It is important for you to identify any potential for harm and determine how this potential for harm could be overcome. Ideally, your research should have no or minimal potential for harm to arise, *if any* at all. This issue is frequently one of the most difficult for students to address, as it requires you place yourself in the other person's shoes. The question is *not* whether you believe harm could occur, but whether participants or potential participants believe that harm could occur.

There are some topics in which it could be expected that some harm might arise. For example, what would happen if you were to examine sexual harassment in the workplace, which might identify respondents who are either presently being harassed or who were harassed in the past? Ideally, student projects that examine issues in which there is a high likelihood of participant harm should not proceed *unless* a supervisor is actively involved and ensures that processes were in place to address any harmed individuals. One possible way to address the harm in such a project would be to provide participants with information on appropriate counseling services or support organizations dealing with the issue. Such materials should be distributed to all respondents with the information sheet, so that those who

need assistance (whether they participate in the research or not) can seek it. In this way, you will have at least provided a mechanism to assist any individuals who are harmed, and thus, you have undertaken a duty of care in regard to participants. While the research per se did not harm the individual, it may cause additional distress for participants recalling negative experiences they have had; thus it is your responsibility to address the issue.

In other situations, there could be more direct harm to participants. For example, a study looking at drinking on the job could result in someone being fired if the study identified that the person had a drinking problem. Even showing participants in advertisements used in the media may embarrass or offend some segments of the community. Thus, you must identify any potential harm to participants and seek to ensure that the potential is minimized within the study as well as that participants are clearly informed of the potential for harm.

Though not a mechanism for preventing harm, in cases involving interviews and/or focus groups, it is usually beneficial to have respondents sign consent forms in addition to receiving an information sheet. This makes it clear that individuals have agreed to participate; however, given that individuals always have the right to withdraw at any time, this may provide less protection than anticipated in a focus group (consent forms will be examined in more detail in the subsection titled "Other, More Specific Ethical Issues," and some of the web links in Table 5.3 also give examples of consent forms, and there is a copy of a consent form for the case focus group on the web). The real answer to minimizing harm is to select research topics and methods that preclude any harm arising.

Other, More Specific Ethical Issues

The issues discussed so far have been applicable to a wide range of research projects. There are, however, a number of ethical issues that may arise in specific situations or when using specific types of research techniques. A number of these issues will be discussed in the following subsections, but once again, these are in no way comprehensive, and additional ethical issues could also arise. The issues below are meant only to identify the issues that might be more likely to arise.

Conflicts of Interest

This is defined as where your interests as a researcher and the participant's interest may differ, which will potentially affect your decisions as a researcher. For example, a person who is paid commission to sell goods, but is expected to give fair and unbalanced advice, would or could be a conflict of interest in regard to selling more and helping customers. In your research, a conflict of interest could arise when you or one group member is an individual employed in the industry you are researching and you do not inform all respondents of this fact. While the research may be a good opportunity to gain competitive information, such action would be ethically inappropriate. It is always surprising how much competitively useful information a business will give student researchers. The easiest way to overcome this problem is to not place yourself or your group in this position to start with. That is, if you work in one firm in an industry, do not try to look at your competitors. However, if you do, it would be imperative that you make your dual status as researcher and competitor clear in the information sheet.

Focus Group Participant Identification

When conducting a focus group, the researcher is not the only one involved, as there are also other participants in the focus group, and its dynamic nature is one of the benefits of using focus groups (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of focus groups). However, this means that the information discovered within the group becomes common knowledge among all those in attendance. Therefore, it is important that members of the focus group sign appropriate consent forms, especially in situations in which any information discussed might be used against the person who said something or where a third person is being discussed. The consent form could include a statement regarding participants keeping the information discussed confidential (i.e., not sharing it). A statement in the consent form is, of course, not foolproof, as it is unclear that any penalties for breaching the agreement could be imposed, but at least you are undertaking due diligence to protect participants and others, as well as informing focus group members of the potential that this can arise.

Deception

In some cases, telling respondents your true intent might modify their response or behavior (Athanassoulis & Wilson, 2009; Kimmel, Smith, & Klein, 2011). For example, if your group were undertaking an experiment to determine whether an interviewer's attire or gender influences respondents' behavior, you would not want to tell respondents this, as it would most likely bias the results. However, for the most part, deceit should be *avoided* at all times. This is one of the situations in which researchers might be tempted to apply a teleological ethical view; that is, does the benefit of misleading the respondents outweigh any potential harm to participants.

In some cases, the deception may be minor; for example, in examining the impact of health labels on alcohol, respondents are told it is a study of factors affecting alcohol consumption. However, in other cases, such as the one related to collecting competitive data under the guise of student research, it is more substantial. Deception should be used only if no other method of researching the issue is available ***and*** the students' instructor is well aware of what is happening. In addition, at the conclusion of the intervention—for instance, at the end of the survey in the first example—participants should be informed (i.e., debriefed) of the study's real purpose and be given the right to have their information withdrawn (i.e., not used). In extreme cases of deception, the debriefing may need to be more detailed and structured, although student researchers should generally not undertake studies requiring excessive deceit. Many IRBs and ethics committees will not allow deception within research projects, and thus, you need to know your university's views on this issue before you start planning your project.

Observation

Another ethical issue that may arise when undertaking projects involves the observation of participants (Watts, 2011). This becomes an ethical issue especially when you are observing people in a public or quasi-public place. For example, what if you want to examine how respondents behave in the ice cream section of a food store (i.e., how much time they spend there, what products they look at, etc.)? In this situation, it is likely that asking to observe people will modify their behavior, and therefore, researchers may not want to explicitly ask each person if he or she

can be watched. One solution to this issue is to have notices placed at the entrance of the store indicating that researchers will be operating in this area at these times. Individuals not wishing to participate could then avoid this area at these times. Should you wish to videotape these encounters, it may also be advisable to seek permission using a consent form to use the information after the participant has been taped, even if a notice is used (if someone declines, you should erase this person's data). The consent process would, therefore, be a type of debriefing, but you would also want to give participants an information sheet and consent form, and of course, they can decline to participate, and you would erase the data collected. Broader covert observation, such as hidden cameras in work areas without employee awareness (and possibly consent), should be avoided, and it is not only usually inappropriate but often illegal as well.

Permission From the Organization/Location

One ethical issue that students frequently overlook relates to getting written permission from the organization in which the research is being undertaken or the location in which the data are being collected (such as video taping people in food stores). Our students have been ejected from shopping malls simply because they did not have written permission to be there. In one case, the person who gave them oral permission had simply not passed this information on to those responsible for security. In another case, the students' contact suddenly left the organization, and since the students did not have permission in writing, they were not allowed to proceed.

When getting written permission, it is also important that the person you talk with has the authority to give that permission and that your activities are organized well in advance. For example, one group had been planning for several months to examine employees in one organization, assuming that getting permission would be easy. They waited until the last minute to approach the firm and unfortunately discovered that their request would have to go through several managerial levels within the organization. The approval process would take several weeks, which was more time than they had. Thus, making sure you plan things out is critical.

Video/Audio Taping

In a number of situations, you may wish to audio record or videotape the specific intervention, but it needs to be explicitly considered from an ethical perspective (Schuck & Kearney, 2006). This can be done for a number of reasons, such as to ensure that no verbal information is missed in a focus group or interview. Alternatively, you may be attempting to capture nonverbal information, such as body language. Taping of participants was discussed earlier, but the ethical issues associated with it should be reinforced here as well. It is essential that when taping participants, you clearly state in the information sheet and receive a signed consent from the participant that they agree. You should also allow participants to have some ability to edit the tape, and as with all activities, allow participants to withdraw, even during the taping process. You should tell participants what will happen to the taped material after it has been analyzed, and in some cases, it may be worthwhile to offer the tape to the participant. In most cases, the tapes will be erased after the data have been transcribed. Do not forget that even if you obtain written consent from participants to tape them, they still have the right to withdraw at any time, and in these cases, you are required to remove their data.

Consent Forms

Whenever interviewing (other than a researcher-administered survey), audio/videotaping, or conducting a focus group, we strongly suggest that you not only use an information sheet but have the respondent sign a consent form as well (some of the links in Table 5.3 provide samples of these, and one is included in the online materials). You should keep the consent form as an indication of informed consent by the respondent, should any question arise. However, you need to remember that a person who signs an informed consent form can still rescind his or her consent (i.e., change his or her mind for any reason), as it is not a binding document. If this occurs you must not use the information he or she provided.

For the most part, the information contained in the consent form should be similar to the material in the information sheet, but there is more emphasis on what the respondent is agreeing to do and on the understanding of any potential negative consequences, as described in the information sheet. Exhibit 5.2 provides an example of a consent form. Some specific information that should be included relates to whether the participant agrees to be quoted in the final report and what happens to any tapes of the interview or focus group that might exist. As discussed in the focus group section, there is also a clause related to keeping any information discussed during the focus group confidential, which is designed to protect the other participants in the focus group discussions.

EXHIBIT 5.2

Example of a Consent Form

<Italic material should be filled in for the specific project.>

<UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD>

<Supervisor's/Lecturer's

Contact Details>

CONSENT FORM

<Title of Project>

I, (please print) _____ have read the information on the research project *<Title of Project>* that is to be conducted by *<Student name(s)>* from the University of <X>, and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this investigation, which involves <X>. [If this consent form is for a focus group, students may wish to include a statement such as, I agree to keep all information confidential and not discuss it with individuals other than the student researchers.]

I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time without reason or penalty. My responses will remain confidential, and any documentation, including audio/visual tapes, will be destroyed once the project is completed. My identity will not be revealed without my consent to anyone other than the investigator conducting the project. [This clause would state that he or she had given his or her consent to be quoted if he or she had.]

<Signature>

<Date>

Student Examples

Examples of Consent Forms Used in the Sample Projects:

Honors Thesis 1: "VTAC Change of Preference," page 108 (revocation of consent, p. 109) (http://polonskywaller.com/)

Honors Thesis 2: Game, set, match, page 137 (revocation of consent, p. 138) (http://polonskywaller.com/)

Fair Trade Project Document X (https://polonskywaller.com/student-examples)

Plagiarism, Academic Fraud, and Misrepresenting the Results

There are three broad issues that you need to be aware of when completing your research project report and communicating results with your professor and with any business clients, should they exist: plagiarism, academic fraud, and misrepresenting results.

Plagiarism

The first issue of plagiarism relates to all student work; that is, you need to be very careful that you do not misrepresent someone else's work as your own. The appropriate techniques for referencing others' ideas are discussed in the chapter on Literature Reviews. There may be a temptation to "cut and paste" others' work to form new ideas. This is unfortunately very easy with the use of electronic databases and information on the web. Do *not* be tempted to simply cut paragraphs (or more) out of other documents. *If* you do, make sure you appropriately cite this material. In most universities, plagiarism is a breach of the student code of conduct and can result in failure of the subject or class or even expulsion from the institution. Therefore, you need to be very careful when using material from others to ensure that it is adequately referenced. Also, don't forget that if you found the material, so can your professor.

While directly cutting and pasting material that is not cited is one type of plagiarism, there are a range of other types. Turnitin has identified a range of alternative types of plagiarism (see Table 5.6), and you need to make sure you do not commit any type. There are significant penalties for plagiarism at most universities, ranging from a zero on the assignment to being excluded from the university. It also needs to be highlighted that when assessing plagiarism, "not understanding the rules" (i.e., intent) is no defense. Almost all universities have support materials in regard to discussing plagiarism issues. There are even an increasing number of software tools that allow you to check the degree to which your report includes works of others: academic, industry, and even other student assignments (of course, this also includes appropriately cited materials as well). Table 5.7 provides a list and link to some of these software programs, which sometimes provide other support materials as well. While some may be free, others may require your university or professor to subscribe or you need to pay to use.

Table 5.6 The Plagiarism Spectrum: 10 Types of Unoriginal Work (http://go.turnitin.com/webcast/plagiarism-spectrum)

1	Clone	Submitting another's work, word for word, as one's own
2	CTRL-C	Contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations
3	Find–Replace	Changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source
4	Remix	Paraphrases from multiple sources, made to fit together
5	Recycle	Borrows generously from the writer's previous work without citation
6	Hybrid	Combines perfectly cited sources with copied passages without citation
7	Mashup	Mixes copied material from multiple sources
8	404 Error	Includes citations to nonexistent or inaccurate information about sources
9	Aggregator	Includes proper citation to sources, but the paper contains almost no original work
10	Re-tweet	Includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text's original wording and/or structure

Table 5.7 Plagiarism Checkers and Support

Name	Link	Material Provided
Plagiarism.org	http://www.plagiarism.org/	Plagiarism checker, training materials, referencing support
Grammarly	http://www.grammarly.com/?q=plagiarism&gclid=CNLT8Z7KxLgCFYTApAodAVEAlg	Plagiarism checker, writing support
Plagiarism Pro	https://www.plagiarismcheckerpro.com/	Plagiarism checker
Turnitin	http://turnitin.com/en_us/home	Plagiarism checker

Academic Fraud

Once students begin undertaking research involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, there is also the possibility of what is known as academic fraud, which in most cases is perceived by universities as bad as, if not worse

than, plagiarism. Academic fraud involves the intentional misrepresentation of what has been done. This would include making up data and/or results from the data or purposefully putting forward conclusions that are not accurate. Students may be inclined to commit academic fraud for a number of reasons. For example, they may have difficulty accessing the correct people to survey and so may be tempted to make up data. In other cases, students may find that their results are inconclusive and think that they need to find *something* in order to receive a good grade. Unfortunately, academic fraud is also an issue within academia more generally and several high profile academics have lost their jobs because they were found to falsify their research and results (Bhattacharjee, 2013).

The temptation to commit academic fraud should be avoided. As you need to realize, most research projects have "hiccups," and in fact, many academic journal articles include a limitation section that identifies unforeseen problems. To ensure that you will be able to get the data needed, think about the project in advance and come up with contingencies should problems arise. For example, one group of students wanted to undertake a random telephone survey of 18- to 25-year-old males by randomly calling people until they obtained 100 responses. After they called 100 people, they found that they received only one response. On looking at the census data, they found that this group (18- to 25-year-old males) represented only 5% of the population; thus, if they were lucky, they would have had only five respondents from their 100 calls. The group decided that they would rather survey male students in the university cafeteria in this age category. As this example shows, a data collection problem forced the students to modify the design and refocus the question, which in this case was fine and still satisfied the assignment requirements.

In regard to research results, you may get concerned if your findings are inclusive or are inconsistent with existing literature. Many researchers undertake studies wherein they do not find the hypothesized outcomes; unfortunately, you will find fewer of these works published, as journals do not often want to say that nothing interesting was found. However, for student research, this should not be a problem, and in many cases, there might be sound reasons that no result was found. For example, the instrument may have been imprecise, the sample problematic, the context of the study different, and so forth. In most cases, your projects are evaluated on the process rather than on the outcomes, although the criteria to be used to evaluate the research need to be clarified with your individual instructor.

Misrepresenting the Results

The last issue, misrepresenting the results, is especially important for students undertaking their project for a client. In many situations, you will be so good at marketing your work that businesses may forget that these are student projects, which frequently have substantial limitations. In the second place, students are just that, students. You are learning about the application of research to solve business problems and, as such, may make conclusions and recommendations that are inconstant or incorrect based on what you found. Of course, this is not simply a problem with student research as several internationally renowned academics have been found to have misrepresented their results or simply fabricated research (Bhattacharjee, 2013). On occasion, some students (not you, of course) may purposefully misrepresent their work to impress their business

client. Professors, on the other hand, will frequently identify these exaggerations and mark the work down accordingly.

The problem of overclaiming is often difficult to overcome without the assistance of your professor who, as an objective expert, will be able to determine if there are any substantial errors or omissions. If you do have a client, you should make sure that any report to clients clearly specifies what was done and what limitations exist. In addition, we recommend that your instructor provide some objective feedback that is passed on to the client with any final report.

It is critical to remember that in most instances, your project is designed to assist you in learning how to undertake research and is not designed to be publishable work or the same as work undertaken by a professional consultant. As such, there will almost always be problems with the research and identifying these is one way that you can learn how to overcome them in the future. Academic fraud is as serious as plagiarism and is likely to have significant penalties.

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

The introduction of new technology has brought with it some new ethical issues. Each university may deal with these differently, so it is important to find out how the issues are viewed within your university. The first relates to the use of online panels (Couper, 2000). Research organizations establish a pool of people who have agreed to be invited to participate in research. For a fee, the organizations will distribute a survey to their members, and those people who participate usually receive a small amount of compensation. The ethical issue arises in that (a) some ethics committees or institutional review boards have concerns with people being "paid" for their participation, and (b) some committees are concerned with people being recruited through third-party organizations. As online panels grow in use, it is envisioned that the associated issues will be seen less problematic, but it is important to know if your university has a problem with this approach.

A related issue that has sometimes also arisen in terms of collecting data online relates to consent, especially when recruiting minors. The question is, how can researchers be assured that the participants fully understand the information and consent sheets. A response to such suggestions applies equally to postal surveys and thus again should generally disappear over time as a potential concern to ethics committees.

The final issue related to new technology is how does one view information communicated within an online environment (sometimes referred to as "netnography"). For example, say you want to look at a blog or chat site that discusses aspects of a given company or brand? Is this information publicly available or designed to expressly be an open and public communication forum? If this is the case, then there would be limited ethical issues associated with using these communications. However, there are an increasing range of personal communication forums, including Twitter, blogs, Facebook, or discussion forums that are increasingly being used for research. The ethics associated with using these is complex, and there are guidelines being developed that address the complexity of these forums (Kozinets, 2010). Some ethics committees view this information as private communication and therefore suggest that it would not be ethically

appropriate to use the information without the participant's approval. These issues are indeed complex; thus, *if* you are considering using such forums as data in your research, you would be well advised to identify how your university views these issues, as it will eliminate any need to redesign your research if these forums are deemed to be out of bounds.

CONCLUSION

As has been discussed in this chapter, there are various potential ethical issues that you should carefully consider when planning your research, including the timelines for an ethical clearance process and what activities your university does or does not allow. Though the discussion in this chapter can be used as a guide, it is important that you determine what the appropriate rules within your institution are. The objective of these guidelines is to ensure that potential respondents have full information before voluntarily participating in your research. In addition, you need to put yourself in the participant's position and determine if there is any reasonable possibility of harm arising. It is your responsibility to eliminate, or at least minimize, this possibility. Addressing the potential for harm might require a modification of the research design or of the specific questions asked. For this reason, it is important that this issue be considered when designing the study rather than once the project has substantially progressed.

PROJECT CHECKLIST

* Is there any human intervention in this project?
* What ethical issues must you consider?
* Is there any area of "conflict of interest"?
* Does the project need ethics approval?
* Does there need to be consent forms or an information sheet?

Table 5.8 Additional Video, Audio, and Interactive Resources

Resource	Brief Description	Link
"ENRON—A Cautionary Tale" Pearson Education/ ABC	A case study in business ethics designed for educational use Resource type: video Approx. duration: 6 minutes	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSt9Ovt9ksY

Resource	Brief Description	Link
Business Ethics Institute of Corporate Ethics	Series of videos providing an introduction to business ethics Resource type: video series Approx. duration: 12 x 2–3 minutes each	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DT-DZ5VcnQU&NR=1&list=PL36535647B6E504A3&feature=end screen
University of Texas at Austin	"Ethics Defined: Conflict of Interest" Resource type: video Approx. duration: 1:38	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko0Et4UTxZ8
Udacity.com	"Ethics of Milgram's Deception—Intro to Psychology" (discusses debriefing and harm) Resource type: video Approx. duration: 1:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLVO6H8jh58

CASE STUDY

The client wants the students to undertake a research project to examine how consumers might respond to the positioning of HPS as being socially responsible in regard to supply chain issues. To look at this issue, your group has decided that it should first have a focus group, using students, to look at their views. You will then undertake a survey with real consumers to look at their views and possibly ask them to evaluate alternative claims in regard to HPS. Given that these two activities involve human intervention, you will need to get approval from your university's institutional review board (i.e., IRB, HREC, or ethics committee).

- What types of ethical issues might you need to consider in the focus group with fellow students as compared to surveying consumers outside the university?
- If one in your group works part-time for a competitor shoe company, does this raise any new ethical issues? How would you deal with them?
- Talk with your professor and find out the timelines for applying and receiving ethics approval; how might this impact the scheduling of your research?

The online supplementary materials incorporate a range of additional support materials. This includes these items:

1. A draft "completed" ethics form
2. Information sheets and plain language statements for a focus group and interview
3. A consent form and withdrawal of consent form for the focus group
4. An Excel data file that includes a sheet with survey items that are then used to collect data
5. Two images that are used in the experimental study to collect data, as an example that could be used

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. What are the alternative ethical perspectives discussed in the chapter, and why might you apply one approach or the other?
2. Does your university have a committee to review the ethics of student research, and when does it meet?
3. Discuss the types of human intervention you might want to use with your assignment and what ethical issues might arise with the approach selected?
4. Discuss how you can ensure you don't inadvertently commit plagiarism or academic fraud.
5. Design an information sheet and consent form for your research project taking into consideration the ethical issues that might arise.

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