RESEARCH ETHICS

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OVERVIEW

In considering this topic, it is important to understand not only what is research ethics, but also who is responsible for it and how those responsibilities can be fulfilled. Considering why research ethics is important, there are two reasons; firstly, there was an excessive bad experience in the past such as biomedical experiments carried out on prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps during the second world war between 1939 and 1945. This incident resulted in the Nuremberg Code of 1947, one of the earliest attempts to lay down principles for ethical research which was subsequently reinforced by the Helzinski Declaration of 1964 [revised in 1975]. The examples are the 1971 guidelines issued by the US Department of Health and Education and Welfare Code in 1973, published by the American Psychological Association. The second reason is the belief that unethical research is regarded as poor research [Sieber, 1992]. Additionally the result of the research has to be considered both in terms of the benefits which accrue and the cost which is incurred.

Collins Westminster Dictionary [1996] defines ethics as "philosophy which treats human character and conduct and of distinction between right or wrong and moral duty and obligation to the community" or "a systematic study of value concepts and the general principles that justify applying these concepts" [Sieber, 1992]. Whichever definition we take, it will finally provide us with valuable guidance to the consideration of expected behavior. In the case of research, the guidelines help to ensure that research is conducted and directed toward worthwhile goals and that the welfare of the research participants is protected [Diener & Crandall, 1978]

Any type of research can be potentially threatened by ethical problems (Kervin, 1992: 35) which if occur can be very costly. These ethical issues are ones resulting from conflicting sets of values concerning the goals, process and research outcome (Kimmel, 1988, p. 28). Diener and Crandall [1978, p. 17] point out that there are some reasons why as ethical investigator wishes to avoid harming participants. Firstly, scientists recognize that individuals have basic rights that are guaranteed both by our legal system as well as by our moral values. Secondly, a major goal of science is dedicated to the benefit of humanity; therefore, research that harms participants would be in opposition to this goal and the value of the scientists. Finally, scientists recognize that such harms may result in general distrust of science. In this regard, cost-benefit analysis should be appropriately considered although such effort is absolutely uneasy. Take for example in Jakarta a few years ago, there was research that evoked social unrest, especially the housewives because the research reported that one out of three husbands in Jakarta got involved in an extramarital affair. The research, in fact, was subject to questions in regards to its validity, its representativeness of samples, etc.

Research ethics can pertain to the ethics of science (i.e. the protection of the integrity of data) or the ethics of research (i.e. the protection of human rights) (Rees & Fremouw, 1984, in Kimmel et al. p. 36). However, Rees and Fremouw argue that a distinction between ethical and unethical behavior is not dichotomous but rather lies on a continuum that ranges from clearly ethical to clearly unethical. It can also arise from the decision to conduct or not to conduct the research.

Smith (1985b, in Kimmel, 1988, p. 31) identifies some characteristics of ethical problems; (1) Ethical sensitivity does not, in and of itself, guarantee that ethical problems will be sufficiently resolved. (2) Conflicting values tend to give rise to ethical problems. (3) Ethical questions can relate both to the conduct of research and to the subject matter of the research. Determination of proper conduct often requires a broad perspective. (4) Ethical problems involve both personal and professional elements.

INTERNAL-EXTERNAL RESEARCH

The issue of internal-external research is related to business research. According to Kervin et al (p. 35), business research that involves employees is most potent from ethical problems. The reasons have to do with the research content, the researcher's power, the scrutiny of the research plan and invisibility of the research. Certain types of in-

ternal research such as research study on employee performance may produce side effects harmful to those of low performers.

The power discrepancy between managers and employees may contribute to the ethical problems in internal research where the researchers enjoy greater power over participants that makes them afraid to refuse to participate in the research. However, the researcher himself may be a subject to higher managerial authority which may impede him from modifying ethically dubious research plans. Check and balances are often absent in such internal research.

Business research plans often lack scrutiny compared to other kinds of research activity because there is no independent body to examine the research plan, methodology, practices, etc. The major criteria are mostly cost and relevance. Finally, such research is often invisible to other researchers and to the general public; thus, limiting feedback from them especially if the research is conducted by an internal rather than external researcher.

RAISING ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Considering the great potency of getting ethical problems, can a researcher systematically recognize such threats? Kervin et al. (p. 38) proposes four questions; [1] will the research process harm both direct and indirect participants? [2] are the findings likely to cause harm to others (not involved in the study)? [3] are you violating accepted research practice when conducting your research, including analyzing the data and drawing conclusions? It is sometimes difficult though, to find an appropriate standard reference, especially for evaluative and explanatory research (p. 77), [4] are you violating the community standard of conduct? It is like asking whether he/she is honest with himself/herself (Kervin et al. p. 40). Additionally, Kimmel (1988:36) identifies three types of ethical problems that research may cause: (1) violate individual's rights and privacy, (2) leave unforeseen consequences, (3) be manipulated and thus abuse scientific attainment.

Shortly, the researcher must critically and continuously raise ethical questions along his/her research process; the research idea, the design, data collection and analysis, drawing a conclusion and finally the way of reporting.

CHRONOLOGY OF ETHICAL PROBLEMS

1. Research idea

The first stage of the research is to translate social or organizational phenomena into research question [s], purpose, primary variables and boundaries of the problem. As good translation results in research accuracy, Kervin et al, argues that while at this stage a researcher can best anticipate the potential ethical problems (p. 77). For example; is it ethical to research the frequency of individual adult male who get involved in an extramarital affair? Is it ethical to compare achievement motivation among different sub-ethnic or sub-culture groups in a multicultural society like Indonesia? Will it potentially be socially and politically harmful?, etc.

2. Research Design

According to Kervin et. al. (p.151), there are six steps to achieve the best ethical research design;

1. Begin with the basic and specific design that seems most appropriate and relevant to the research problem.
2. Consider threats to research power and internal validity. List them and think about their potential impacts, then modify the design accordingly.
3. Appraise threats to external validity; what threats exist, how serious are their impacts, then modify the design accordingly.
4. Consider non-monetary constraints such as political and social ethical problems. Access data sources, norms and practices.
5. Consider the cost of data gathering in terms of money, personal and time then weigh against the estimated benefits of the study.
6. Check and re-check the internal and external validity of the design that is now considered. The more crucial the problem, the more important the validity attachment.

3. Data collection

Each data source has its own degree of validity, ethical threats, relevance and cost, etc. For example, internal informants (including personal files) may give accurate, but confidential data and invade privacy (Kervin et al. p.186). Representativeness of sample respondents is the most critical one. Additionally, multiple data sources are regarded as the best.

Active participation in a research should be voluntary, because during data collection, people may be put in an uncomfortable, embarrassing, even painful situation. Kervin et al. proposes, if difficult or highly emotional subjects are discussed, self-report is considered as more ethical.

From an ethical point of view, it is better to inform participants the purpose of the research, however it may affect positively or negatively their participation quality,

especially in experimental research and fieldwork where deception and manipulation are some times stressfully necessary. In fieldwork for example, as there is no experimental design, no treatment or measuring instruments are needed in such a study. It seems that such research has no potentially serious ethical problems. But this is not the case. Let us take a closer look at this matter. The method of information gathering is done by creating a "natural" human relationship between the researcher and those people of the research target. Cassel [1982] argues that such a human relationship is an asymmetrical one, as the fieldworker is actually a stranger who enters another culture to learn its ways of doing things or its phenomenon; then, he/she will leave after all necessary information is collected and a report is made by using his/her own discipline and norms or culture. In such situation there are two ethical aspects, firstly there is greater perceived power of the investigator and secondly, there is a certain control of the research settings, particularly in experimental research. Similar to the fieldwork, experimental research also replete with potential ethical problems. However, the most serious risks to those respondents of field research are posed not by the researcher but rather by their sponsors, legal sources and the governmental agencies which may use the research findings.

In conclusion, the wrong things in these types of research are deception [i.e. asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and the participants], manipulation [i.e. the researcher manipulates norms of reciprocity in such ways that pressure the participants to give information which they might prefer to withhold] and, finally unveiling of secrets [i.e. the researcher undiscloses his/her sets of intentions regarding research agendas. An appropriate ethical framework for judging such research is that people are always treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means.

In some cases debriefing soon after the data collection may be appropriate, though problems of contamination may occur where respondents may inform other potential respondents, therefore this condition may affect their participation quality.

4. Selecting variables

Kervin et al. (p. 187) identifies two competing concerns in choosing variables; for a conclusion to be statistically and logically valid, research design must include all causes of the dependent variable. Omitting variables will result in misleading conclusions and recommendations, therefore leading to unethical matters. But considering too many variables may reduce the overall research accuracy.

5. Measurement and data analysis

Kervin et al. (p. 282) argues that potential ethical problems increase whenever a researcher seeks to reduce or control measurement error (intended to improve measurement). The use of Multivariate analysis enables researcher to statistically control certain variables while examining the effects of other variables [Kervin et al., p. 574].

Additionally, Kervin et al. (p. 491) argues that in applied research, preliminary analytical checks are more prudent and cautious. The purpose of such checks is to ensure the validity of the research, in particular that anomalies in the data do not to lead erroneous conclusions. Included in the checks are distributions of variable, i.e. dispersion of cases over a variable's value dispersion which can create data analysis problems.

As it is known, a higher level of measurement allows a researcher to get more accurate results and increase research power (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991, see also Kervin et al. p. 282). In relation to this matter, it is also known that the availability of various sophisticated statistic software such as SPSS make this possible: A researcher who does not adequately know the basic assumptions, limitations and appropriate uses of tools can make defects in measurements, but he/she can still produce conclusions, but possibly mistaken ones.

6. Drawing a conclusion

As a conclusion is directly drawn from data analysis, the conclusion and recommendation quality depends on the quality of analysis.

7. Reporting

There are three possible harms to participants, including indirect ones; (1) harm due to data misuse which is difficult to avoid since it is frequently out of the researcher's authority, (2) harm in terms of bad results regarding respondents' unfavoured predicates, i.e. inadequate performance, (3) harm to indirect participants due to the report of the research findings, i.e. refer to the example of research in Jakarta, the finding really did harm to the wives and children of the respondents and to some extent harmed the public in general.

8. Publication

Finally, research ethics is concerned with problems of the publication in the research findings, namely: (1) the anger of persons (who able to identify themselves in a report) in the way they are reported, (2) subjecting individuals to unwanted publicity, (3) hazards of disclosing data about identifiable individuals or groups to others who have the power to use that information for exploitative

purposes, (4) problems of depicting people in a way that is embarrassing to the larger group to which they belong, and (5) harm done to science, scientific opportunities and to social scientists (Johnson, Risk in the Publication of Fieldwork, in Sieber, 1982, p. 71).

STRATEGY TO AVOID ETHICAL THREATS

- Informant consent is an ethical requirement in a situation where participants will be the subject of substantial danger [Diener & Crandall, 1978, p. 26]. They argue that the informant consent is a procedure in which individuals choose whether to participate or not in an investigation after being informed about the research agendas that would likely affect their decision. The informant consent consists of these elements [a] participants understand that research is voluntary, [b] the participants are well-informed about the research agenda and as much relevant information and consequences as possible that may affect them and, [c] they exercise a continuous free choice to participate or to withdrawal his/her participation.
- For a researcher to maintain his/her awareness on ethical matters, Kervin et al. (p. 77) suggests them to consider other frames of reference, important values and norms in the society etc. Kervin et al (p. 42) further proposes that to avoid ethical problems, a researcher can consider four aspects as follow,
  1. Invest on a mental setting that suggests that unethical research is poor research. It harms respondents as well as damages the researcher's reputation. Recommendation based on suspects findings leads to ineffective action that in the long run may be costly.
  2. Discuss ethical concerns with someone else to gain clarification and second opinions.
  3. Dissociation from the project is an ultimate alternative, but it is occasionally not feasible. In this case the problem moves from the arena of research to that of organizational politics and personal ethics.
  4. Best of all, anticipate ethical problems before the research is initiated.
- To avoid the misuse of the data, the research must make sure that access to the data is limited as well as keeping the anonymity of the individual respondents. Confidentiality falls into two types; physically restrict access to the information and disguise the identity information of each case (Kervin et al., p. 374).
- To avoid the problems of violating the community of conduct, Kervin et al. suggests (1) the researcher has to know what is the standard practice of research and the likely consequences of violating it, (2) using appropriate methods. In the case of difficulties in using the best available methods, the researcher should clearly and forcefully mention about his/her methodological constraints.
- It is important to know that beside general research standards, researchers are governed by their obligation to observe everyday community standards of conduct, including honesty, fairness and the treatment of others with respect and consideration (Kervin et al. p. 41).
- General ethical guidance

  Be sensitive to possibly painful questions and topics,
  Obtain participation through informed consent
  Use identification codes,
  Restrict access to research files,
  Be sensitive to risks: apply a test of accepted risk (Are the risks within a normally accepted range?),
  Know who will use the results and for what purpose,
  Know consequences of inappropriate methods,
  Resist pressures to use faulty methodology,
  Anticipate the possibility of unfavorable results,
  Ensure your methods would stand up to close public scrutiny.

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