ETHICS PROTOCOLS AND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES
SUCCESSFULLY OBTAINING APPROVAL FOR YOUR ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Dan Remenyi
Nicola Swan
Ben Van Den Assem

This extract consists of the Contents Page, the Preface and the Prologue.
The book can be purchased from: http://www.academic-bookshop.com
Contents

Preface .............................................................................................................................................. vi
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... viii
How to use this book ....................................................................................................................... ix
Prologue .......................................................................................................................................... x

A research degree ............................................................................................................................. x
Maturity, sensitivity and integrity ...................................................................................................... xi
A promise is only a promise ............................................................................................................. xiii
Assumptions ..................................................................................................................................... xiv

The Ethics Protocol and the Research Ethics Committee ................................................................. xiv

Chapter 1: Ethics Protocols – The Key Issues ............................................................................. 1
1.1 What is this thing called ethics? ................................................................................................. 1
1.2 Society as a patchwork of ethics issues ...................................................................................... 3
1.3 Ethics and academe ................................................................................................................... 3
1.4 Ethics for academic research ...................................................................................................... 4
1.5 What is a Research Ethics Committee? .................................................................................... 6
1.6 What is an Ethics Protocol? ...................................................................................................... 10
1.7 When a university Ethics Protocol may not be enough ............................................................ 11
1.8 The lead researcher .................................................................................................................. 12
1.9 The importance of the Ethics Protocol ..................................................................................... 13
1.10 Appeals against decisions made by REC ............................................................................... 13
1.11 Discipline ............................................................................................................................... 13
1.12 Paradoxes and contradictions ............................................................................................... 13
1.13 The Research Protocol - an essential prerequisite or a barrier to academic research? ......... 15

Chapter 2: What is research? ......................................................................................................... 17
5.1 Introduction ................................................................. 51
5.2 The need to get going .................................................. 51
5.3 Annual review ............................................................. 52
5.4 Amendments to the original ethics application ............. 52
5.5 Substantial changes or amendments ............................ 53
5.6 Minor or non-substantial amendments ......................... 53
5.7 The modus operandi ...................................................... 54
5.8 The challenge ............................................................ 54

Chapter 6: Data Protection Legislation .................................. 57
6.1 Introduction to data protection ..................................... 57
6.2 DPA Principles ............................................................ 59
6.3 Implications for the researcher ................................. 60

Chapter 7: Cross culture, class and language research ........... 65
7.1 Introduction ................................................................. 65
7.2 Going abroad .............................................................. 66
7.3 Formal guidance provided ........................................ 67
7.4 The gatekeeper ............................................................. 67
7.5 Cultural and Religious Issues ....................................... 69
7.6 Are your respondents ‘vulnerable’? ............................. 70
7.7 Informed consent and language ................................. 71
7.8 Video, informed consent and privacy of data .............. 72
7.9 Confidentiality ............................................................. 75
7.10 Harm ........................................................................ 76
7.11 Coercion – Reward for participation .......................... 77
7.12 Summary and conclusion ........................................... 77

Chapter 8: Ethics Committee Processes .................................. 79
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>What drives the REC process</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>REC reviews and discretion</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Appeals and legal challenges</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Rejection of application</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Managing the process</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Management and healthcare research</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>The stages of the research approval process</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Committee advice and guidance</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Committee requirements</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Researcher misunderstandings</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Decisions handed down by RECs</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Our system of research ethics approval</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 12: Some end notes ................................................................. 107
  12.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 107
  12.2 Intellectual property rights .................................................... 107
  12.3 Plagiarism .............................................................................. 108
  12.4 Outsourcing ........................................................................... 108
  12.5 Relationships ......................................................................... 109
  12.6 Conclusion ............................................................................. 109
Reference list ......................................................................................... 111
Glossary ................................................................................................. 114
Definition of acronyms .......................................................................... 121
Some useful websites and blogs ........................................................... 122
Appendix 1: Research Participants’ Information Document ............... 123
Appendix 2: Letter of Informed Consent ............................................... 126
Appendix 3: Letter of Consent to Record an Interview ......................... 127
Appendix 4: Letter of Consent for photographs or video ..................... 128
Exhibit A: Example of an application form for an Ethics Protocol ......... 129
Index ...................................................................................................... 134
Preface

This book addresses Ethics Protocols related to Masters, Doctoral and other Research which will be conducted under the auspices of a university or similar institution.

Conducting academic research to the highest ethical standards is essential for both the researcher personally and the university or institution at which he or she is working. If the highest standards of ethical behaviour are not maintained then the researcher and the university or institution can easily fall into disrepute.

In recent years it has become more challenging to conduct quality academic research. There are several reasons for this, one of which is the need to have Ethics Protocol approval before the research can begin.

The issue of ethics is ubiquitous in academic research. Some universities claim that all research raises ethical issues, although it is difficult to see how such a blanket claim could be correct. University codes of ethics can be extensive, addressing issues such as what should be and should not be researched; how the research should be conducted; how researchers should work with each other; how the research should be written up, to mention only a few issues.

Universities have become more conscious of ethical issues and more concerned about their responsibilities in this respect. To this end numerous Research Ethics Committees (RECs) and research ethics policies and procedures have been set up.

Although each university has its own procedures with respect to Ethic Committees and how a researcher can obtain ethics approval for his or her research, they generally follow the same basic principles.

This book discusses the background to the need for Ethic Protocols and Ethic Committees and describes the way permission is obtained and provides useful advice about how to cope with the Ethics Protocol approval process.

It is important to note that there is much more to the subject of academic ethics than is addressed in this book. There are many sources of advice about how research should be conducted in the most ethical
fashion. This book provides advice in dealing with the REC which increasingly research students and degree candidates need to address. It is also important to bear in mind that outside of the medical faculties, the need for ethics approval is relatively new for universities and that universities are in the process of finding their way through what is a complex set of issues.
Acknowledgements

A book such as this cannot be written without the help and assistance of many staff and research candidates who have brought to us examples of their experiences with RECs. These people have been from several different universities in this country and abroad. Although we have not been able to repeat all their stories here we would like to acknowledge that these people have made a contribution to our current thinking with regards to Ethic Committee and Ethics Protocol approval.

We would also like to acknowledge a number of friends who have read drafts of the text and offered helpful advice concerning the content and the tone with which the book was being written.
How to use this book

This book has been written as a guide to researchers who have to obtain approval for an Ethics Protocol. The book will also be useful to members of university faculties who are involved in advising students about obtaining ethics approval. This is not a ‘how-to’ book but rather one which provides useful background information. As such it is not intended that every reader will begin at the front and read to the end.

Some readers may wish to go directly to the Chapter 4 on how to complete an ethics application or to Chapter 11 which discusses substantial and non-substantial amendments etc.

Readers who find they need to amend their application for ethics approval should read Chapter 5 first.

Other Chapters provide a background and explain in a more general way how RECs and Ethics Protocols work.

Copies of some of the documentation required by a REC are supplied in the Appendices. These should not be used by readers and are supplied for illustrative purposes only. Each university has its own instruction pages and forms and these should be acquired by a researcher for his or her use in obtaining an Ethics Protocol approval.

There are different ways of describing the individuals with whom a researcher comes into contact and or/who contribute during the course of a research project. Names such as respondent, informant, participant or subject are commonly used. It has been decided not to standardise on one name in this book, but to use different names in different parts of the book, reflecting the preferences of the three authors.

A blog has been created for those who would like to contribute to the discussion on this topic. See http://ethics-dilemmas.blogspot.com/
Prologue

“I was thrown out of N.Y.U. in my freshman year . . . for cheating on my metaphysics final. You know, I looked within the soul of the boy sitting next to me.”

Woody Allen in the film Annie Hall 1977

A research degree

Academic research in the field of business and management studies is difficult. It presents considerable intellectual challenges as well as some physical and even emotional challenges. The intellectual challenges relate to being able to create from the literature and other more practical sources a suitable research question, then preparing a research design, implementing the design and coming to some useful conclusions. In doing this the researcher has to struggle with concepts such as positivism, interpretivism and critical realism to mention only a few frameworks which are regularly used in academic research.

The physical challenges relate to the fact that academic researchers are required to spend many hours reading a wide range of material in the form of peer reviewed journals and research books. They then need to create references and summaries from this material. An academic researcher may then have to interview 20, 30, 40 or more informants or distribute and collect questionnaires. The physical work in visiting informants in different parts of the country is substantial, as is the concentration needed to conduct useful interviews. Preparing data from notes or recordings in order to create transcripts requires energy and stamina. If questionnaires are used there are a number of demanding processes involved in the preparation of the data and analysis of the results. Academic research may involve the researcher working in the organisation being studied, i.e. action research or taking a participant-observer approach. This can be difficult.

Emotional challenges arise from the fact that a degree such as a doctorate can take three, four, five or more years to complete. A research masters degree could take two or three years or more. It requires emotional strength to keep up the level of enthusiasm required over such a period. During the research process the researcher will need to present to faculty and colleagues what he or she is doing. Sometimes the feedback can
be critical of the work conducted to date. Academics can be blunt in their opinions and sometimes quite hurtful. Facing up to this requires emotional strength and faith in one’s abilities.

**Maturity, sensitivity and integrity**

There are three other characteristics which an academic researcher needs to possess in order to be successful. These are maturity, sensitivity and integrity.

Many academic researchers in business and management studies will work extensively in the field as opposed to being closeted in some sort of laboratory. Being in the field means having a wide range of contact with people from all walks of life. Academic research transcends class, race, gender and other social boundaries. It requires a substantial degree of maturity and self confidence to be comfortable in situations which transcend the researcher’s normal social boundaries. This is the case both when the researcher is in the presence of the Chairperson of a multinational corporation and when talking to someone who is working for the minimum wage.

Similarly, sometimes academic research will take the researcher to different countries or even different continents. Abroad, the academic researcher may require patience to solicit data from people who speak a different language, are perhaps illiterate and may be profoundly suspicious of strangers. This requires a high degree of maturity.

Much of the work required of an academic researcher has to be done on his or her own. It is often a lonely business and can be for extended periods of time. This type of work requires not only commitment but also the maturity to be able to give up leisure time for the possibility of future rewards. Not everyone is able to do this.

Another issue is that academic researchers can sometimes be offered work opportunities at the university or in other organisations. These opportunities could adversely affect the academic research and the re-
searcher needs to have sufficient strength to control temptations\(^1\) such as this.

Academic research can require researchers to work with people who have intense feelings about the subject being studied. For example, a study into how organisations handle redundancies would most probably require the researcher to interview people who had been made redundant. Being made redundant can be a traumatic event in the life of an individual and an interview on this subject would need to be handled with considerable care. If the informant were to give an indication of not coping well with such an interview, for example if the informant began crying, then it would behove the researcher to suggest that the interview be terminated until the informant felt better. The interview could be rescheduled for the next day or the next week. It would be improper for the researcher to try to press on with an interview if the informant was emotionally upset. This is of course no more than common sense.

The issue of researcher integrity is challenging. In the first place it is difficult to define this word. Most people would agree that integrity means more than just being correct or following the rules, i.e. being honest, or even having the best interests of others in mind. One understanding of the word suggests that integrity is about having the will to be fair, and following it through with actions. It implies being honest, not just with other people with whom one comes into contact, but also with oneself. Shakespeare expressed this succinctly when he wrote in Hamlet Act 1, scene 3, 78–82

\[
\text{to thine own self be true,}
\]
\[
\text{And it must follow, as the night the day,}
\]
\[
\text{Thou canst not then be false to any man.}
\]

This level of honesty is more than many people can cope with. Integrity implies a state of wholeness and self confidence in the personality of the individual.

\(^1\) The main temptation here is that researchers can sometimes earn a substantial amount of money by teaching on undergraduate programmes. Another temptation is to become involved with other university work for the prestige which can accompany working for a university.
An individual’s integrity is challenged continuously as he or she interacts with others in society. This is because there are different versions of what integrity means and there are different ways of interpreting the normal course of everyday events. People will have different points of view about the same issue. It is probably not possible to find a large number of people who would completely agree in all respects with any given definition of integrity or any one interpretation of the integrity of an event.

Although we talk about academic research being supervised, much of the work actually happens with the researcher on his or her own with little or no interference or guidance from the supervisor. It is because of this freedom that it is important to discuss early on in the research process the ethics rules with which the researcher needs to comply.

One of the reasons why a research Ethics Protocol is so important is that it makes researchers aware of the need for integrity and for transparency in the research process. For those who are already familiar with this requirement the research protocol is a reminder. The application for research permission and the approval of the Ethics Protocol may be seen as a promise made by the researcher to conduct the research with the highest level of integrity.

**A promise is only a promise**

But it has to be understood that no matter how clearly the ethics rules are spelt out and no matter how enthusiastically the researcher embraces these rules, at the end of the day the only thing that matters is how the researcher conducts him or herself. A promise is always nothing more than a statement about what might happen in the future and we hope that the events which will take place will be influenced by the promise. It is on this basis that a REC should consider Ethics Protocol applications.

---

2 It has been said that if a promise has not been kept it was not a promise in the first place. Readers may take their own position on this philosophical point.
Assumptions

From the above it can be seen that academic research operates under several different sets of assumptions. It is first assumed that the researcher has the intellectual, physical and emotional strengths to complete the degree. These are difficult to assess from an ex ante point of view and that is why the completion rates of research degrees are often poor. Maybe universities could spend more time and effort exploring how these issues could be assessed and understood before anyone is accepted for a research degree.

Secondly, it is assumed that the researcher will be adequately mature, sensitive and committed to working with integrity throughout the research.

There is no easy way of assessing an individual’s maturity, sensitivity and integrity. There is also the fact that a research degree is a voyage of discovery and the views of an academic researcher are likely to change during the period of the degree. It is not possible to be sure that these changes will all be for the better.

The Ethics Protocol and the Research Ethics Committee

It is not argued here that because these issues are so challenging nothing should be done about research integrity. Of course a prospective researcher should apply for permission and a REC should carefully inspect the research plans and make appropriate recommendations where appropriate. However, it is not in this process or the documents created during the execution of this process that the integrity of the research and the researcher lie and it is important to be aware of this. The Woody Allen comment in the film Annie Hall, quoted above, reminds us of the fact that it is probably impossible to look deeply enough into a person’s psyche to be able to assess his or her integrity.