

FROM THE EDITORS: AN ETHICAL QUIZ

Organizations routinely develop organizational codes of ethics that outline acceptable behavior for their members. The Academy of Management (AOM) is no exception. Its “Code of Ethics” can be found at www.aomonline.org/aom.asp?ID=&page_ID=239 and in every December issue of the *Journal*.

Although it contains a great deal of important information regarding our ethical responsibilities, it is likely that many of us have not carefully studied the Academy’s “Code of Ethics.” The primary reason for this is that most of us are indeed ethical individuals who believe that the same is true of our colleagues with whom we share membership in the Academy. Given these realities, we conclude that it is not necessary for us to be told how to act ethically. However, just as it is likely that we learn something we did not know or possibly knew and forgot every time we take a driving test, each of us can gain valuable insights by reading the AOM “Code of Ethics.” As evidence for this assertion, take the ethical quiz that follows as a reminder of the behavior the Academy requires of us as researchers. As we know, refreshing our memory about the details of what is expected of us within a certain context can be a useful exercise!

Scenario 1: Plagiarism

You are grading an assignment turned in by one of your students. You are pleasantly surprised by how well it reads. Then it hits you: this is not the student’s writing. To confirm your suspicions, you type a few key words into the Google browser and hit “enter.” And there they are—the exact words your student has turned in to you for a grade. You give the student a zero on the assignment and write a lengthy note on the paper explaining that it is wrong to present someone else’s words as your own. When you want to use someone else’s words, you explain, you must put the text in quotes and provide a citation and page number. Such situations are easy. No grey area here. The student has plagiarized. The student was wrong.

But what about situations that are not so clear-cut? Have you ever reused a paragraph or two that you wrote describing the tenets of a theory? Reused a description of a sample you wrote for another paper? Reused a description of a scale you used in another paper? Reused or briefly modified a section

of a paper that developed an argument for a hypothesis? Done any of the above with someone else’s words?

If we are truly honest with ourselves, who among us can say that we have not done at least one of the above at some time in our careers? According to the AOM “Code of Ethics,” all of the above can be considered plagiarism. Specifically, section 4.2.1 states:

AOM members explicitly identify, credit, and reference the author of any data or material taken verbatim from written work, whether that work is published, unpublished, or electronically available. AOM members explicitly cite others’ work and ideas, including their own, even if the work or ideas are not quoted verbatim or paraphrased. This standard applies whether the previous work is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

Scenario 2: Data (Re)use

You just got off a long conference call with your research team devoted to designing your next data collection effort. After careful thought, you were able to design an effort that will net you data for three different papers. Provided there is no overlap among the variables across the studies, no harm, no foul, right? What if just the control variables overlap? What if the variables overlap, but none of the relationships studied do? Still OK? Regardless of whether there is overlap between the studies, do you tell the editor to whom you submit a paper from this data set that you have used it before?

According to *AMJ*’s submission guidelines, the answer to this question is *yes*. This requirement is clearly spelled out during the submission process when the submitting author is asked to respond to the following two questions:

1. Has another manuscript from this same database ever been previously submitted to *AMJ*? If yes, please note this in your cover letter, explain how this paper differs from the earlier one, and attach a copy of the previous manuscript.
2. Has another manuscript from this same database been accepted by or previously published at *AMJ* or at another journal? If yes, please note this in your cover letter, explain how this paper differs from the previous one, and attach a copy of the accepted or published manuscript.

The “Code of Ethics” also speaks to this issue, in section 4.2.3.5:

When AOM members publish data or findings that overlap with work they have previously published elsewhere, they cite these publications. AOM members must also send the prior publication or “in press” work to the AOM journal editor to whom they are submitting their work.

Scenario 3: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

We all have heard of the horror stories of Tuskegee, Milgram, and Mengele. Obviously, our research would never incorporate such egregious violations of human rights. However, has your research ever incorporated deception—such as a cover story to throw the respondents off the track of the true purpose of your study? Have any of us ever used a subject who is less than 18 years of age? Have we ever been involved in a research project that spanned multiple schools and only had IRB approval from one school? Used secondary or de-identified data without IRB approval? Received IRB permission to conduct a study but made changes to the procedures outlined in the protocol during implementation of the study without first getting permission from the IRB to do so? Conducted a study without filing an IRB protocol? All of these actions can be considered violations of the human subjects’ standards at some institutions.

What about research conducted at institutions that do not have IRBs or do not require research efforts be approved? At a minimum, scholars in this situation must adhere to the components of the AOM “Code of Ethics” that speak to the rights of subjects:

Participants. It is the duty of Academy members to preserve and protect the privacy, dignity, well-being, and freedom of research participants. (“Professional Principles,” item 2.)

Informed Consent. When AOM members conduct research, including on behalf of the AOM or its divisions, they obtain the informed consent of the individual or individuals, using language that is reasonably understandable to that person or persons. Written or oral consent, permission, and assent is documented appropriately. (1.7.)

When deletion of personal identifiers is not feasible, AOM members take reasonable steps to determine that the appropriate consent of personally identifiable individuals has been obtained before they transfer such data to others or review such data collected by others. (2.4.2.)

Scenario 4: Coauthors

We’ve all been there—worked on a project with a coauthor who did not hold up his/her end of the bargain. What did you do? Move him or her down in order of authorship? Bump him or her off the paper? Did you undertake either of these actions without first discussing it with the coauthor? Perhaps you gave the nonparticipating coauthor a deadline contingent on continued authorship that you knew she/he could not meet. How about adding a coauthor without getting the permission of those already on the paper? Have you submitted a paper to a journal or conference without all of the authors being aware of your actions? Or perhaps you have experienced one or more of these situations.

Just as there are ethical guidelines associated with fair treatment of subjects, the AOM “Code of Ethics” also addresses appropriate treatment of coauthors. For example, section 4.2.3.1 notes this:

In cases of multiple authorship, AOM members confer with all other authors prior to submitting work for publication, and they establish mutually acceptable agreements regarding submission.

Scenario 5: Reviewing

Let me begin by saying thank you to anyone reading this who has ever reviewed for *AMJ* or any other journal. Your time and efforts are greatly appreciated! Indeed, your willingness to give back to the community as a reviewer is an incredibly important part of scholarship.

Let’s say you just finished a review for us. While reading the paper, you thought of a really great idea for a study. Isn’t that how the research process works? You read, think, and generate ideas to test. But what if you have all of the data needed to test the model put forth in the paper you just read—and rejected because the authors did not have adequate data? Can you test their model? What if the ideas presented in the paper are ones upon which you can build, and you e-mail a copy of the paper you reviewed to a coauthor so she/he can see what you have in mind? Is this allowable? The answer to these questions, according to AOM “Code of Ethics” section 4.2.5.1, is *no*:

In reviewing material submitted for publication or other evaluation purposes, AOM members respect the confidentiality of the process and the proprietary rights of those who submitted the material.

Scenario 6: Reporting Results

You have just finished cleaning a data set that you have spent months collecting. You run your

first set of analyses and realize that the p -value for the key relationship is .056. Do you round down? What if the SEM model doesn't fit? Do you implement the suggestions offered in the modification indexes? If you do, do you report the modifications you made in the paper? What if the beta is significant in your regression analysis, but the overall step in which the beta is located is not? Do you report the beta and not mention the fact that the overall model was not significant? Have you ever published a paper that uses co-owned data without the co-owner's knowledge? Not surprisingly, all of these actions violate the AOM "Code of Ethics," which provides the following guidelines on presenting results:

AOM members do not fabricate data or falsify results in their publications or presentations. In presenting their work, AOM members report their findings fully and do not omit data that are relevant within the context of the research question(s). They report results whether they support or contradict expected outcomes.

We have reached the end of the quiz. Were you surprised that some of the actions described were ethical violations? The scenarios I've described touch on only a few of the many important ethical

standards endorsed by the Academy. A review of the AOM "Code of Ethics" will remind you of the behaviors that we as Academy members are to exhibit when engaging in research projects. I encourage you to review the "Code" and make it required reading in your doctoral seminars.

Unethical conduct is being flushed out of the corporate world at an unprecedented rate. Thus, it is important for us to instill high ethical standards in the future generation of business professionals we teach. However, it is equally important for each of us to *walk the walk* as well as *talk the talk* when it comes to ethical behavior. Accordingly, reviewing the ethical code to which each of us is committed as a member of the Academy of Management is an activity with the potential to reenergize our commitment to display the highest level of ethics as scholars seeking to contribute to management literature and managerial practice. Very importantly, conducting research as specified by the Academy's "Code of Ethics" can be the foundation for serving as ethical role models for our students and colleagues.

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