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Do International Management Researchers Need a Code of Ethics?

Abstract and Key Results

- While the methodological problems associated with international management research have been widely discussed, much less attention has been given to the ethical dilemmas confronting those who seek to undertake their research in cross-cultural settings.

- Three vignettes are used to identify and explore the nature of those ethical dilemmas. Attention is directed at ways in which ethical conundrums might satisfactorily be resolved. Specifically, the paper addresses the question of whether a code of ethics would be useful for international business researchers.

- In an era when ethics is central to all social activities, it will be critical that management researchers are equipped to deal with ethical questions relating to their studies in other cultures. Though codes of conduct can be helpful in guiding and regulating researchers' behavior, there are a number of other means by which the desired ends can be achieved.

Keywords

International, Management, Research, Ethics

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Introduction

Ethical issues surrounding the conduct of international business and international management have received considerable attention in the literature. Writers (for example, Beyer/Nino 1999, De George 1993, Donaldson 1989, Enderle 1999, Fritzsche 1997, Kline 2005, Robertson 2002, Robertson/Crittenden 2003) have grappled with the weighty and thorny nature of the issues and sought to offer solutions to many ethical problems confronting businesspersons. It is clear that although most issues are not new (Schollhammer 1977), resolving them remains an on-going challenge. Among the means proposed for organizations and individual managers to receive ethical guidance is the creation of codes of conduct that will help steer decision makers and actors towards ethical decisions and practices (Behrman 2001, Kaptein 2004, Payne/Raiborn/Askvik 1997, Smeltzer/Jennings 1998, Williams 2000). It is perhaps ironic, then, that in the wider academic community in which many of those work who have been intent on resolving ethical dilemmas for businesspersons, there might well be some who have been, in their own research, oblivious to or neglectful of equally weighty and thorny ethical issues. It might be argued that just as attention must be given to providing managers with the tools by which to make ethical decisions in their work, so too must academic researchers have the knowledge and skills to recognize and deal with situations that can ethically be problematic.

It is interesting to note that as international management research has burgeoned there has been increasing attention to various methodological problems associated with such work (e.g., Adler 1983, Adler/Doktor/Redding 1986, Cavusgil/Das 1997, Redding 1994, Sekaran 1983, Tayeb 2001). There has also been considerable discussion about the difficulties – indeed, dangers – in trying to transfer management philosophies and practices abroad (typically, from the United States – e.g., Hofstede 1980, Fey/Denison 2003). There has, however, been almost no attention (Punnett/Shenkar 1996) given to the ethical concerns which might be associated with international management research. As we will note, such ethical concerns have been addressed across the social sciences more broadly, but often only quite narrowly. Indeed, in some fields, such as psychology and anthropology, there has been limited specific mention in published work of the ethical dilemmas a researcher has faced or might confront; this is almost never the case in international management research publications. We seriously doubt that this is because ethical conflicts are not present; rather, because they have been unrecognized or deemed to be not very important.

In this paper, we seek to identify the ethical problems confronting those who undertake management research outside their own country – where, we suggest, ethical issues are likely to be much more significant than they are when the research is undertaken in the researcher's own country – and to explore how they might satisfactorily be resolved. We will argue that the ethical aspects of international management research are highly relevant, always important, and that, just as method-

ological issues have great potential to create questions about the validity of any international study, so, too, may inattention to ethical matters. Consideration is given to how such problems might be avoided or minimized; among other things, we consider whether international management researchers might benefit from a code of ethics to help them avoid ethically questionable approaches and practices. In order to focus attention on some of the most common and troublesome matters, three vignettes are presented and analyzed. By highlighting the ethical standards invoked by these vignettes, it is possible to examine the various forms that a code of ethics might take. Our purpose in this paper is *not* to provide definitive solutions to the ethical problems we identify – and certainly not to draft a code of ethics. In our view, that would be both premature and presumptuous. Rather, our intent is to provoke discussion and debate about these matters among international management researchers.

Our discussion of these matters has been set out in several sections, with increasing specificity. We begin with an examination of research ethics in general. Following this is specific consideration of ethical issues as they relate to international social science research generally and to international management research particularly. In relation to international management research we focus on four key matters. First, consideration is given to just who the interested parties are in such research and the rights they might be argued to have vis-à-vis the researcher and any research project. Second, the paper reflects on the relationship between ethical issues and political issues, especially in the context of international research. Third, we examine the much greater likelihood for ethnocentrism in international research and the additional ethical conundrums that implies. Fourth, the paper deliberates on the extent to which there might be universal ethical standards that could be applied to research ethics in international management research. The paper concludes with an assessment of the various means by which ethical dilemmas in international management research might be resolved, including the creation of a code of ethics.

Research Ethics in General

There exists a substantial body of literature which has addressed matters pertaining generally to research ethics, to be found in: textbooks on research methods (e.g., Cooper/Schindler 2003); more specialized books on the topic (e.g., Shamoo/Resnik 2003); guidelines published by government bodies (e.g., Steneck 2004); and the codes of conduct of a multitude of academic organizations (universities, professional academies and so forth – e.g., the websites of the Association of American Universities and the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs). Besides noting the areas in which ethical difficulties may arise, such

works typically attempt also to provide some guidance on how to deal with them. Taken as a whole, the concerns which have been raised are wide-ranging, including: research misconduct (such as fabrication of data or plagiarism); conflicts of interest (by, say, a researcher who is both an academic and a consultant); data ownership and access to data (including intellectual property matters); the protection of human subjects (most commonly expressed in terms of concerns relating to informed consent, confidentiality, deception, right to withdraw and potential dangers to the research subjects); collaborative research (including the protection of unequal partners); and publication of results (including authorship).

The nature of the concerns raised in this work is to some extent a function of the specific discipline and research field in which the work is being conducted. Medical research can introduce different ethical concerns than, say, research in anthropology, psychology or economics. Nevertheless, there are some widely agreed areas of concern, even if the particular way in which those concerns are handled might differ in respect of approach, language and stringency. Furthermore, paralleling the question of the specific matters about which ethical concerns are likely to arise, a variety of parties can be identified to whom ethical responsibilities may be due, including the research subjects, collaborators, the researcher's profession, sponsors, funding agencies, even 'society' or country.

The conclusion one can draw from these multiple perspectives on research ethics is that matters are almost never straightforward – and often quite messy. The problems are made many times more intricate because there also may be competing sets of ethical principles that plausibly guide the resolution of ethical dilemmas – or, on the basis of which, one decides whether there is even an ethical conflict to manage.

There are a number of theories of ethics – and various ways of categorizing them (for an excellent overview, see Rachels/Rachels 2007). While we shall not describe them at length, it is important to our discussion that their essence is understood. Some theories place their focus on the outcomes or end results of decisions and actions; that is to say, whether decisions or actions are ethical or not is determined by their consequences. These theories are accordingly often described as either 'consequentialist' or 'teleological'. Perhaps the best know theory of this type is utilitarianism – 'the greatest good for the greatest number – originating from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. On the other hand, some theories (typically labeled either 'non-consequentialist' or 'deontological' and most commonly identified with the work of Immanuel Kant) focus on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of various interested parties; using these theories, decisions and actions are judged to be ethical or unethical on the basis of whether reason-based rules that recognize those rights are followed and that justice is done. Still further theories address ethics from a feminist, social contract or virtue perspective. And, especially importantly in relation to this paper, ethicists have debated the validity of cultural relativism, the notion that different cultures have different moral codes and that standards of what is ethical or unethical are essentially culture-bound.

Depending, then, on the perspective one takes, different answers will be provided as to whether a particular decision or action is ethical and 'what should be done'. As a result, researchers might legitimately feel at a loss to know what to do. Even where a code of research ethics exists for their discipline, it may not be clear how it might be used to answer what could well be complicated ethical queries (Korac-Kakabadse/Kakabadse/Kouzmin 2002).

Ethics and International Management Research

If the varied predicaments associated with research ethics are murky and complicated at the general level, they become significantly more problematic when the research is being undertaken by someone in a country other than his/her own. Such is the case for many people working in the field of international management, particularly those doing so-called cross-cultural management research. Precise definitions of what constitutes 'international management research' are difficult – it is a highly interdisciplinary field. However, a significant part of it constitutes empirical studies that require data collection from human subjects in different nations or cultures.

As previously noted, the problems that international management researchers confront are often shared by cross-cultural researchers from other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology and it will be useful to compare the various disciplines to see what each might learn from the experiences of the others. For all that, a fundamental claim of this paper is that the ethical issues confronting international management researchers are sufficiently different that they need to be separately considered. In the first place, precisely because of the interdisciplinary nature of the field there is a danger that ethical issues will not be adequately 'covered' by the debates, discussions, codes and so forth of any of the disciplines that it draws on and, thus, shall fall in a wasteland between them. Even more importantly, however, is the fact that there has been much more controversy surrounding the objects of study in international management than is true, say, for anthropology, sociology or psychology. 'Multinational corporations' – or profit-making organizations of any description – 'expatriate managers', 'global industries' (and many other descriptors) tend to arouse much more debate than the units of analysis typical in other research fields, especially when they are mixed with terms such as 'Third World', 'underdeveloped', 'developing' and the like. Added to the controversy surrounding the power of those entities in relation to the countries in which they may operate, there are legitimate questions to be asked about the power and status of researchers from developed countries relative to parties with whom they might be involved in their research in less developed countries, be those parties

subjects (workers who are nationals of the country in which the work is being done, say), local collaborators or others.

There are many opportunities for conflict between the values of the researchers and those being researched and, again, in situations of power inequality, the possibility not just for ethnocentric values to intrude but for a kind of colonial or imperialistic set of presumptions to operate that prejudice the way the work is undertaken. Even allowing for situations which are not so 'uneven' (as, say, between researchers from developing countries doing research in other developed countries), clearly it is quite possible for there to be differences in worldviews (Koltko-Rivera 2004), as well as political and legal systems, all reflecting or impacting upon ethical beliefs. It should be obvious, too, that the possible range of parties with ethically-grounded interests will be much larger than in a management study conducted solely within one country and that assessing the costs and benefits to them will be much more complex. Specifically in respect of research conduct, there might be very different notions of what practices are or are not acceptable. And even though there might be agreement, for example, that the subjects of the research should be covered by 'informed consent', just what that means in different places at different moments for different purposes may be poles apart.

In summary, while it is always possible for ethical questions to be raised about research even in the context of a study carried out in one country by researchers from that country, especially where there are human subjects involved, the questions that should be raised about research carried out in cross-cultural situations are both greater in number, more diverse in nature and much knottier. We would argue that it behooves international management researchers to acknowledge explicitly (and be seen by important stakeholders to be so doing) that their field is at least as ethically problematic as others, and potentially more so. Though we might not go as far as the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (1978) did when it asked, "Is cross-cultural research ethically permissible?" and concluded that "… a lot of it is not", we should, nonetheless, make sure that we have carefully thought through beforehand the issues in sufficient detail that we have adequate answers when such questions are raised about our work.

In the following sub-sections, we will consider some of the more common and troublesome ethical dilemmas confronting international management researchers under four umbrella headings: interested parties and their rights; ethics and politics; ethics and ethnocentrism; and emics, etics and ethics. In order to enrich and enliven our discussion, we present three vignettes which raise different types of ethical issues. As Robertson (1993, p. 592) notes, "Vignettes allow a range of situational or contextual factors to be considered in making judgments about whether or not certain behavior is ethical" (which presumably explains why they have been widely used in discussions of ethics – see, for example, Fritzsche 1997, Steneck 2004, Petrick/Quinn 1997). Though the vignettes are fictionalized, they are based on a combination of real-life examples with which we are familiar.

Interested Parties and Their Rights

In any research project involving human subjects, ethical obligations are present, usually invoked and frequently even freshly created. By its nature, in international research endeavors those obligations grow in size and complexity; they must then be recognized and managed for the sake of all the many parties involved. Typically, professional codes of ethics attempt to set out precisely who those parties are and the rights that they have. Were we constructing such a code for international management researchers, key among these parties delineated would be the following: the research subjects or informants (both individuals and organizations); local collaborators; the researcher's profession; the researcher's employer (usually, but not always, a university); and local communities, 'society' and the country at large, in the country in which the research is being undertaken. Each party might claim or have a claim that various rights or ethical obligations be recognized and respected. For example, the research subjects might have, at least, all of the rights that were noted earlier in the paper relating to informed consent, confidentiality, deception, right to withdraw and 'no harm'. It is not the purpose of this paper to actually canvass what all of those rights might be or to construct a draft code (but see IACMR 2005). Rather, we are intent on opening up a range of issues to provoke consideration and discussion of the possible *parameters* around those rights. Let us, then, try to illustrate the complexity of the task by referring to some dimensions as they relate to research subjects and collaborators.

As noted above, a generally accepted right of subjects in any research project is one of informed consent. This means that the researcher essentially must inform prospective subjects about the nature of the research in which they are being asked to participate and they in turn must give their consent (usually in writing) before their involvement in the research commences. Both the right and the means of ensuring informed consent are relatively unambiguous to, say, an American, a German or a Finn. However, in some cultural contexts it is not quite so straightforward; for example, in Uganda where notions of personhood have a meaning different to those held by most Westerners, were consent to be sought, customary law might well dictate that it is the informant's father who must give it, even though the informant himself may be an adult (Marshall/Koenig/Grifhort/Van Ewijk 1998). Also, the mere signing of a consent form does not necessarily mean that the subject's rights are protected because they may lack familiarity with what research implies, feel they cannot refuse such an authority figure as the researcher or be unclear about the intent of the project (Punnett/Singh 1994). A feminist ethical critique would go much further than requiring informed consent – it would give the subjects the right to have a say in how the research is conducted (Christians 2000), something that would be especially difficult to do in a cross-cultural setting (Manderson/Wilson 1998).

Another imperative in most codes of professional ethics is that of beneficence or 'do no harm'. There is often a danger that subjects could be worse off as a result of

research conducted. Several writers have argued that this danger could be much greater in cases of international research where, for example: there is a government policy of discriminating against some parts of the population, as was the case in *apartheid* South Africa (Hofmeyr/Templer/Beaty 1994); culturally-based emotional issues (Hubbard/Backett-Milburn/Kemmer 2001) are not well understood; or the results of the research might be used by powerful elites (Rakowski 1993). The possibility that the respondents are not accorded appropriate respect in relation to sensitive value-related matters (intrusive questions, say, about the impact of their religious values on their managerial style) is almost inevitably higher if the researcher does not have a very thorough knowledge of that culture. Thus, it is not merely a question of getting the subjects' agreement to participate that is critical to doing no harm; rather, it is being sensitive to those rights throughout the entire research process. An example of best practice that could be cited in this regard is the seminal participant-observational study of a Japanese bank by Rohlen (1974). In an appendix to his book, he describes how he: initially negotiated the ground rules with the person in charge; was careful always to check with his colleagues the appropriateness of his involvement and to make sure he protected their identities; was mindful of the fact that his 'Western' lenses might not do justice to the situation as Japanese would see it and sought their confirmation of his conclusions; and tried to avoid stereotyping. There are some, though, who have argued that informed consent can never really be assured in participant-observation studies, especially in cross-cultural situations, because the process is so open-ended (Bourgois 1990). It may be that the only way of ensuring that the collection and dissemination of research data and results are really 'fair' to the subjects is to solicit their views about what has been written about them (as Rohlen did). However, this process could, itself, be problematic, given possibly large differences in status, power and so forth between the researchers and the subjects. One might go further in this regard and argue on consequentialist grounds that in situations in which there are such disparities (not only at the level of individuals but also at the national level) there is an ethical responsibility not only to avoid harm but to actually *do good*.

Another group that could be vulnerable in international research are local collaborators, a possibility again recognized in some professional codes such as that of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. The danger is that, especially in situations again of disparities in status and power, collaborators in the host-country might be exploited in various ways (perhaps not least in the matter of authorship) by their foreign colleagues (Del Monte 2000). As the theoretical imperatives for more international research, in turn, result in a need for greater cross-cultural collaboration (Peterson 2001), such possibilities can only increase. Another ethically-grounded argument is that where research is being conducted in Third World countries by researchers from developed countries, there is an *obligation* to involve local collaborators so that there can be a contribution to the development of the discipline in the host country (Hamnett/Porter/Singh/Kumar 1984). An additional benefit could be that ethical problems pertinent to the research itself could

be discussed with the local collaborators. However, if the ethical standards of the local collaborators are substantively different than those of the foreign researchers this might create another interesting ethical conundrum.

Vignette # 1.

As part of a cross-cultural study of labor practices of multinational corporations, and driven by a belief that many such firms were turning a blind-eye to practices that would not meet the occupational health and safety guidelines in their home countries, the researchers undertaking the study decided that at least some of their data-gathering needed to involve covert methods, including secret videotaping. Furthermore, in order to gain access to the research sites, it was necessary to conceal from the firms and their managers the real intention of the research. The research was completed successfully and the results subsequently published in both academic journals and more popular media. In response to requests for interviews by television stations, some of the videotape material from the on-site visits was screened in the researchers' home country and further afield. The firms received considerable adverse publicity and several senior managers in the host country were held responsible by the firms and lost their jobs.

In relation to the rights of affected parties, a number of large issues also arise with regard to possibly conflicting obligations. For example, what if the international research is not being conducted solely for academic purposes but as paid consulting work (a not uncommon situation in international management research)? In such a case there could well be conflicting obligations to the subjects, the 'employer' (the firm for which the work is being carried and possibly also the university of which the researcher is a staff member) and the researcher's profession. In reference to Indonesia, Wright (1994) posed several ethical dilemmas confronting researchers when they uncover corruption, find worker mistreatment or come up with findings that could jeopardize a possible business deal. The issues set out in Vignette # 1 are of this type – were the researchers acting ethically when they, first, concealed the purpose and methods of their research and, second, published their findings to the detriment of the company that they studied? Was there a 'higher purpose' served by their research? More broadly, can it be argued (as, for example, by Bourgois 1990) that sometimes deception is acceptable? Or as Punch (1986) would argue, aren't researchers often devious in getting information out of those they are researching, even if only by feigning friendship or liking? Perhaps the situation is one in which, in order to get the research information in a particular country, the researcher needs to provide gifts (bribes?) that could be in conflict with his/her employer's ethical code (Counelis 1993) or their professional code of ethics, a situation analogous to the possible person-role conflict (Kahn/Wolfe/Quinn/Snoek/Rosenthal 1964) often experienced by expatriate executives (Schaffer/Harrison 1998).

Ethics and Politics

In international research, and arguably especially in a field such as international management research, ethics and politics are largely inseparable. Warwick (1980, p. 321) has argued that, "While analytically distinguishable, the politics and ethics of cross-cultural research are tightly interwoven. Insensitivity to politics would be a grievous breach of ethics … A disregard of research ethics, on the other hand, could touch off local, national, or even international *contretemps*."

This is an area in which the issue of there being not only the potential for conflicting ethical obligations but also of political interests is writ large (see also, Christians 2000, Hamnett/Porter/Singh/Kumar 1984, Punch 1986) and sensitivities abound. As Manderson and Wilson (1998, p. 215) have said in respect of applied anthropology – a field in which multinational mining corporations, among others, have a significant engagement, "Ethical, moral and political circumstances intrude at every point in the research processes, from the earliest decisions about funding to the last decisions regarding publication". Of course, what might worry governments (particularly undemocratic ones) is not so much that political processes could impact on the research process but that the research could impact on the political processes (Warwick 1980). It may be, however, that governments seek to stop research not just because they believe it may harm their own narrow interests but for legitimate reasons surrounding national interest. It may be, for example, that they are genuinely concerned that scarce resources such as highly-trained academics are being coaxed to collaborate in research that is trivial in relation to the other problems that those persons study.

Vignette # 2.

Country X mandates that all foreigners seeking to undertake research in their country apply for a research permit. The permit application requires a detailed outline of the methodology, including the names of the persons and organizations who will be studied; referees' reports attesting to the significance of the work; a certificate of a clear police record from the researcher's home country; and a local sponsor (typically, a reputable university). Provided the agency in charge of such matters is 'satisfied', a research visa will be issued, permitting the researcher to travel to the country. After arrival, the researcher must attend an interview at the agency, following which visits must be made to the police department for another permit; the Department of the Interior for another; the Office of the Governor for a third; and, finally, the sponsor to clear the project again. Hearing of these requirements, and deciding that, firstly, the research that they intended undertaking could not seriously be considered as contentious (it was a study looking at the relations between expatriates and locals in subsidiaries of firms from Country Y); secondly, that they

would not do anything in their research that would not meet the ethical expectations of their home country (Country Z); and, thirdly, that their fieldwork was unlikely to come to the attention of the local authorities, the researchers decided to avoid going through the formal procedures and simply apply for a tourist visa and then go about the research in as unobtrusive manner as possible.

In Vignette # 2, one might ponder why there is such a bureaucratic process that foreign researchers must negotiate before they will be permitted to conduct research. But on its face, and under all principal ethical systems extant, there was a prima facie obligation on the part of the researchers to abide by those laws. It may have been inconvenient (and, by the standards of the researchers, unnecessary) but it was required, both ethically and legally. How frequently, we might ask, do researchers turn a blind eye to such regulations or bend the truth to suit themselves?

Foreshadowing discussion in the next section on ethnocentrism, it is interesting to note that the belief that one can separate 'science' and 'politics' is much more prevalent in some places (for example, the United States) than others (for example, Europe or Latin America). Bourgois (1990, p. 43) has expressed strong views on this matter, saying, "The eminently political orientation of a supposed apolitical commitment to empirical research must be appreciated for its internal inconsistencies and ethical poverty", a perspective shared by Christakis (1992).

Ethics and Ethnocentrism

As is fairly well understood, all social science research studies suffer from the problem that embedded in them are the rarely stated but often passionately-held beliefs and firmly-held assumptions of the researcher. As Payne (2000, p. 308) points out, such "research assumptions … involve personal and social values that can have moral consequences through the choices and actions that the researchers take". In management research generally (Alvesson/Deetz 1996, Warwick 1980) and international management research in particular (Hofstede 1980), there has been a strong underlying current of Western empirical positivism, allied with the notion that researchers are entitled to (and, moreover, should) go forth and uncover 'truth'. As Hofstede (2001, p. 18) points out, the very notion of cross-cultural investigation "… probably reflects a Western universalist value position". The International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology's Statement on Ethics (1978, p. 3) is even more specific, saying that "cross-cultural research … is valued only within a certain cultural system – that of the middle class or, better, the intellectual-technocrat class, of the industrially developed world". Sometimes, though very rarely, this viewpoint is given voice by Third World researchers (Durojaiye 1979).

In cross-cultural research, of all areas, there ought to be a clear understanding that there might well be differences in the worldviews, social paradigms, meta-theories and mindscapes (Payne 2000) of the researcher, on the one hand, and those being

studied, on the other; that values permeate everything (Tancredi 1995). As Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) have put it, "Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm …" Though most of the criticism (often venomous – see, for example, Hamnett/Porter/Singh/Kumar 1984) of ethnocentrism is leveled at Western research conducted in Third World countries, there are also somewhat different research paradigms as, for example, between the United States and Europe, that get reflected in different research questions and different methodologies. Recent research by Nisbett (2003) has revealed just how extensive these differences are between the 'West' and the 'East'. The point is simply this – not to recognize these differences, respect them and, wherever possible deal with them is not only to open ourselves to accusations of academic colonialism or imperialism (Pye 1992) but, in a very fundamental way, to be acting without regard to that required by ethical deliberation and constraint.

Vignette # 3.

A group of internationally-recognized academics from Country X (a rich and powerful country with a well-developed tradition of empirical research) determined to undertake an international comparative study of management philosophies and practices, including those in Country Y (a Third World country with an underdeveloped educational system, especially at the tertiary level). Unconstrained by any requirements for formal permission the researchers set about over some months collecting data, principally by interviews (using local interpreters) and questionnaires (which they had translated from their own language into the language of the host-country). The data was subsequently analyzed using both content-analysis methods and multivariate statistical techniques. It was published in reputable journals in the researchers' home country. When the work was, in due course, read by academics from the host-country, however, they were exceedingly critical of what they believed were false or naïve assumptions and interpretations made by the researchers who, they argued, had fundamentally misunderstood the situation and had contributed nothing to the academic community, the subjects of the research or the country. Furthermore, the host-country government was very upset by the possibility that, since the results put local management practices in a rather negative light, there could be an adverse impact on future foreign direct investment.

Another matter associated with ethnocentrism that also carries ethical implications is the danger of undertaking research that, while important to us, might be considered trivial or irrelevant in another context (country). This is the key issue set out in Vignette # 3. Hamnett/Porter/Singh/Kumar (1984) and Warwick (1980) both argue that simple survey research might be open to criticism not only on methodological grounds but ethical ones, too, in that the solutions or findings they provide may be superficial and even misleading; that deeper analysis would not only be more rigorous but also more ethical. While not specifically referring to the

ethical aspects, Redding's (1994) review of a large body of comparative management literature and, in particular, his comments on the superficiality of much of the research conducted in that field, suggests that such criticisms might well apply there. Recent moves to create indigenous theories and research instruments in management (Gopinath 1998, Lau 2002, March 2005, Tsui 2004) and allied fields such as psychology (Kim 2001) can be seen as, in large measure, a response to dissatisfaction with Western theories and methods – and attitudes.

Emics, Etics and Ethics

Drawing from psychology, we know empirically that there are certain aspects of human behavior that are universal (etics) and others which are culture-specific (emics). So it is, too, with ethics. The very nature of cultural differences is contrasting values and associated ethical ambiguity. Thus, what is deemed of ethical concern in one country might not necessarily be so in another. This will apply as much to research ethics as it does to other practices (Robertson/Crittenden 2003) and is reflected, amongst other things, in the rather different codes of ethics that exist between countries in respect of one profession (Leach/Harbin 1997). There may or may not be agreement, then, between persons from different cultures about whether particular practices are of ethical concern and, if they are, how they should be handled or resolved (Schlegelmilch/Robertson 1995). Even when there *is* substantial agreement about what constitutes objectionable practices, the form of moral reasoning used to arrive at that conclusion may be substantially different (Husted/Dozier/McMahon/Kattan 1996) and the application of the values may vary depending on the specific situation (Wines/Napier 1992), in both cases for what are often very deep-seated cultural reasons (Thorne/Saunders 2002). Given that management is, in general, at the centre of much ethical debate, the likelihood that the ethical precepts of the international management researcher will be different from those with whom he/she is engaged in the host country is very high. Using Kuhn's (1962) concept of incommensurability, Payne (2000, p. 312) comments that there may be "… a lack of common measure, mutually exclusive beliefs and very different vocabularies." Among other things, this will add further to the complexity of the foreign researchers' relationships with local collaborators.

The debate surrounding these questions is frequently cast in terms of ethical univeralism versus ethical relativism. Considerable attention has been given to considering whether universal ethical standards (hypernorms as Donaldson and Dunfee 1999 refer to them) might be developed for managers (Beyer/Nino 1999). Donaldson and Dunfee (1999, p. 41) conclude, "The plain truth is that ethics requires a balance between the universal and the particular, and when the balance is lost, the moral game is up". Referring specifically to the matter of research ethics, Christakis (1992, p. 1089) argues for "… ethical pluralism and humility rather than either rela-

tivism or universalism". One might well argue that for international management re-searchers, as much as any others engaged in cross-cultural investigations, "We must navigate, in short, between the simplicity of ethical universalism and the evasion and complexity of ethical relativism, between intellectual hubris and moral paralysis … We must face and accept the intertwining of ethical variability" (Christakis 1992, p. 1089).

Table 1 draws together these various considerations and summarizes the issues raised in the three vignettes, highlighting: the activity or process that was involved;

Table 1. Types and Examples of Ethical Issues Arising from Vignettes

	Activity/Process Involved in Vignette	Results of Research Conduct as Outlined	Examples of Ethical Issues Raised	Examples of Ethical Standards to be Invoked
Vignette #1	Covert data gathering	Exposure in academic journals	Informed consent	Fairness
	Conceal focus of research	Exposure in popular media	Invasion of privacy	Duty/Justice
	Conceal planned use of data collected	Public use of covert collected data	Conflict of interest: academic versus consulting roles	Legal guidelines and rules or constraints as ethical limits
		Loss of jobs	Deceit	Consequential balancing
Vignette #2	Research visa & permit process avoided	Unobtrusive conduct to avoid detection	Conflict of interest: deciding for self applicability of process	Legal guidelines and rules or constraints as ethical limits
	Conceal reason for travel to obtain tourist visa		Conflict of interest: deciding for self that home ethical expectations set limits to those of host	Duty/Justice
			May limit usefulness of data due to self-limiting acts to collect data while remaining invisible to authorities	Consequential balancing
Vignette #3	Unconstrained data collection	Exposure in home academic journals	Failure to understand host	Duty/Justice
	Translated questionnaires	Host subjects aggrieved; puts subjects in false light	Failure properly to evaluate one's own thinking	Consequential balancing
	Translated interview sessions	No contribution to academic knowledge	Failure to understand subjects	Professional competence to handle research project
	Standardized home country procedures applied to data	No contribution to host community	Failure to understand project	Professional preparation for study

the results of the research conduct that followed; examples of the ethical issues raised; and the types of ethical standards invoked. It should be clear, even from these three vignettes, that a large number of somewhat complex ethical problems confront international management researchers. The central question is what can or should be done to alleviate them.

A Code of Ethics?

A great many professional bodies have sought to deal with the ethical dilemmas that researchers in their respective disciplines may face by developing codes of ethics (e.g., Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions 2005, and Gorlin 1999). They have been designed not only to outline what the profession believes is virtuous and to heighten their member's awareness of ethical issues but, in many cases, to set out what conduct is or is not acceptable and even impose sanctions on those who do not comply. Perhaps because of the interdisciplinary nature of management studies, codes of ethics for those engaged in management research have been seriously lacking compared to those that exist in other social sciences such as psychology, anthropology and sociology. The Code of Ethics of the Academy of Management states simply that, "Sensitivity to other people, diverse cultures, to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, to ethical issues, and to newly emerging ethical dilemmas is required", but does not detail or discuss what those ethical issues might be. The Academy of International Business does not have a code of ethics.

In contrast, a body such as the American Anthropological Association (AAA) devotes a significant portion of its Code of Ethics to "Responsibility to people and animals with whom anthropological researchers work and whose lives and cultures they study". Some examples of the words and phrases used to convey these obligations provide some insights into the tone of the Code: "… to avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people … worked with or studied"; "… to consult actively with the affected individuals…with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved"; "informed consent … does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form … it is the quality of the consent, not the format, that is relevant"; "… carefully and respectfully negotiating the limits of the relationship"; "… recognize their debt to societies in which they work and their obligation to reciprocate with people studied in appropriate ways"; and "applied anthropologists … should be alert to the danger of compromising anthropological ethics as a condition for engaging in research …".

The question, then, is whether, since there are a variety of ethical issues for international management researchers to resolve, a code of ethics would be useful for them and their profession.

Table 2. Types of Ethics Codes Flowing from Various Concerns

Demands of Duty/Justice	Consequential Calculations	Legal Demands or Constraints	Professional Standards
What is owed by virtue of common humanity: • truth • fair dealing • taking needed steps to attain contextual understanding	• consequences must be explicitly formulated • clearly discounted by probability of their realization • consider all agents involved at time and in future.	• application of written rules/codes • application of unwritten rules/codes • weight of shared legal norms offset by weight of unshared legal norms • application of international norms.	• weight of home standards • weight of host standards • applicability of professional standards • applicability of academic standards.
Yields:	Yields:	Yields:	Yields:
Code outlining explicit actions to fulfill demands	Code listing format or formulas to conduct balancing process	Code mandating legal assessments as ethical markers or limits	Code cataloging and cross-referencing extant guidelines

As already noted, ethical codes can serve many purposes from the educative to the punitive, aspirational to admonitory, advisory to mandatory. As Table 2 sets out, depending on where emphasis is placed – demands of duty/justice, consequences, legal demands or constraints, professional standards – different types of codes will be yielded.

There is no universal agreement, however, that codes of ethics are the best or the only way to achieve the desired outcomes. Just as the very idea of cross-cultural research may be deeply rooted in certain cultural values, so is the notion that the best way to regulate behavior is by codes. Schlegelmilch and Robertson (1995) observed that European firms are much less likely than American firms to develop written ethics policies and to provide ethics training for their executives. Where they do, there are often striking differences in content between the two (Langlois/ Schlegelmilch 1990). Palazzo (2002) argues that there are deep-seated differences across cultures underlying these differences in practices, and argues that any attempt to impose American-style ethics programs on firms in Germany would lead only to resentment. Any code that seeks to be 'universal' must, therefore, utilize culturally-appropriate mechanisms if it is to work (Weaver 2001).

Even when codes don't take an overtly punitive stance or contain specific sanctions for misconduct, they often give the appearance that those at whom they are directed can't be trusted to act ethically. While it may be that there are individual members of any profession who are prepared to be willfully unethical, in many cases the behavior may arise from what might be better described as ignorance or naivety (another example, perhaps, of a view that what works well at home will work well abroad). In any event, as we have seen, conceptions of what is ethical behavior vary considerably from country to country. If we were to seek to develop a universal

code of conduct for international management researchers, the likelihood is that there would be vigorous (and probably unresolvable) debates about what the code should contain and that it would therefore be diminished, like so many international agreements, to the lowest common denominator. A major problem with being very specific, anyway, is that it is impossible to anticipate all of the ethical issues that a researcher might confront. Further, codes are not very effective in helping to re-solve situations where there are conflicting obligations to various parties. Indeed, codes can be counter-productive or lead to perverse outcomes if not carefully drafted and applied. Perhaps, then, the most one might hope from a code of ethics is that, as general as it might be, it heightens the awareness of international management researchers about the ethical dimensions of their work. While many of those di-mensions may be shared by other disciplines working in cross-cultural contexts, the particular aspects of international management research would mean that it deserved a code of its own. Should, indeed, professional bodies in our field go about developing a code, they might usefully bear in mind the Global Business Standards Codex developed by Paine, Deshpande, Margolis and Bettcher (2005) designed to assist multinational companies to develop codes of conduct. It should be noted, however, that the authors emphasize that it is not feasible or sensible to build a model code and that companies must carefully consider what best suits their circumstances.

It is interesting and informative to our task in this paper to examine further aspects of the tone of the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Among other things, it notes that "… it is inevitable that misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values will arise" and that, "anthropologists are responsible for *grappling* with such difficulties and *strug-gling* to resolve them in ways compatible with the principles stated here" (italics added). Further, it makes it clear that anthropologists have a duty to be informed about the ethical dimensions to their work. Pertinently, the Code ends thus: "This statement does not dictate choice or propose sanctions. Rather, it is designed to promote dis-cussion and provide general guidelines for ethically responsible decisions". Overall, then, the AAA has acknowledged that a code of ethics is the beginning of the matter of ethical behavior, not the end, and that much rests on the individual researchers and the organizations that employ them in ensuring that decisions made and actions taken are ethical. Further, it recognizes that the process is not straightforward and that it requires that the individual researcher wrestle with the issues that confront them.

Integrity-Based Approaches to Ethics

As the foregoing discussion has alluded to, there are a number of means other than codes of ethics by which international management researchers can be assisted in meeting their ethical obligations. Heightened awareness can be achieved by such

things as formal ethics training, increased opportunities for discussions with colleagues about specific ethical problems, mentorship by experienced and ethically exemplary international researchers, not to mention the process of ethical clearance through formal ethics committees that most university-based researchers are subjected to. It might be argued that the most desirable situation is not one in which there is a highly formalized and potentially punitive code guarding standards but, rather, one in which there is a high degree of self-regulation in which researchers are developing not only awareness but skills to deal with difficult problems and in which they have internalized important values. After all, the ethical problems that are encountered by the researcher in practice may not be the ones that were anticipated in the ethics protocol considered by the ethics committee or discussed in the training that the researcher may have received. If the researcher has developed the ability to self-regulate their behavior, we could be more confident that ethical conduct will follow. We should not assume, though, that the good judgment and integrity that this implies is any more 'naturally' acquired in respect of ethics than it is in relation to more conventional methodological matters – especially where cross-cultural research is concerned.

Since it may well not be possible to resolve each and every one of the ethical dilemmas that may be faced in cross-cultural situations, Skubik (1995, pp. 650 et seq.) has proposed that it is important that an approach be adopted that is "… committed to reflection and dialogue, to giving serious attention to one's own practices and framework, and respect to principles and practices not one's own". These are sometimes described (Nijhoff/Fisscher/Looise 2000) as monological and dialogical approaches. Similarly, Karmasin (2002) talks about the need for "discourse" and, where possible, the development of metanorms; and Christakis (1992) also suggests "negotiation" and "tolerance" as hallmarks of such an approach. Simply being aware that a given situation has, or may have, an ethical dimension – what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe as an 'ethically important moment' for the researcher – is a fundamental precursor to ethical behavior. Among other things, we would argue, such a reflexive methodology requires researchers to 'situate' themselves ideologically (in all senses), making as clear as possible the assumptions on which they are operating and the background to their perspectives – in much the way that Hofstede (2001, pp. 523 et seq.) does in describing "The Author's Values". As Haverkamp (2005, p. 152) points out in respect of counseling psychology, "Heightening awareness of our social role, our skills and our knowledge base can enhance our sensitivity to ethical issues and inform the choices we make". Equally, this approach will require putting in place concrete mechanisms by which the reflexivity may occur, as, for example, Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999) did in the collaboration of their British researchers with Chinese research colleagues, where they used a two-pronged observational process they described as 'mirroring' and 'contrasting'.

Just as important as reflexivity on the part of individual researchers, however, may be the integrity of the organizations with which they are associated, especially

their employer. Making the case for what she calls an integrity-based approach to ethics management, Paine (1994, p. 106) has stated that, "Ethics … is as much an organizational as a personal issue". While acknowledging that compliance-based ethics programs (of which codes are an obvious example) will be a necessary component of any ethical system, she argues (p. 111) that organizations (through their senior managers) must "… create an environment that supports ethically sound behavior …" She outlines (p. 112) the hallmarks of an effective integrity strategy thus: "the guiding values and commitments make sense and are clearly communicated"; "[organizational] leaders are personally committed, credible, and willing to take action on the values they espouse"; "the espoused values are integrated into the normal channels of management decision making and are reflected in the organization's critical activities"; "the [organization's] systems and structures support and reinforce its values; and "managers throughout the [organization] have the decision-making skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to make ethically sound decisions on a day-to-day basis".

The empirical evidence supports the value and importance of integrity-based approaches. As Weaver, Trevino and Cochran (1999) showed, while external forces may shape the form that a corporation's ethics program takes, top management's commitment to ethics is a critical factor in determining whether there is a narrow focus on compliance or a broader emphasis on values. Further, in a major study of financial executive's decisions, Stevens, Steensma, Harrison and Cochran (2005) found that the existence *per se* of ethics codes was not enough; one of the critical factors in determining executives' strategic decisions was whether they believed the use of ethics codes would create an internal ethical culture and promote a positive external image for their firms.

As it is with companies, so it is with the organizations – most often, universities – with which international management researchers are affiliated: ethical conduct must be modeled and championed from the top down and must be built into the way those organizations operate. Though this will almost certainly imply the use of research ethics committees, it will demand much more besides. When faced with those ethically important moments referred to earlier, researchers need to be led by the values of the organization, as well as their own moral compasses, to make ethically sound choices. There is no magic formula by which at the organizational level by which this can be engendered – any more than there is at the individual level. However, it will certainly require strong value statements and demonstrated commitment by university presidents and their senior management team; research into the prevailing attitudes of researchers towards ethics; the identification of existing systems that impede ethical research decision making (O'Neill/Hern 1991); training of researchers in the handling of ethical dilemmas; and the creation of systems that promote and reinforce ethical decisions.

The professional bodies with which international management researchers are affiliated, and the academic journals in which their research is published, must lend

their weight to encouraging integrity-based ethical conduct. Codes there may be, but there must also be internalized values, actively encouraged and fostered by such bodies, that assist researchers in wrestling with the ethical issues they will undoubtedly confront. As Hosmer (2000) has pointed out, this is likely to lead not only to conduct that is 'right' but conduct which is also 'effective' in terms of its impact on the reputation and performance of those organizations.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have sought to reveal that international management researchers will almost certainly confront weighty and thorny ethical dilemmas in their work. Some of these will be important 'nuts and bolts' type matters such as how to ensure confidentiality, obtain truly informed consent, and otherwise protect their subjects. Others, however, may be more subtle, insidious and invidious, such as the need to ensure that we are not imposing our research and other values on those we are researching. It is our view that these ethical dilemmas are often not well understood. It is our observation that they are rarely discussed, debated or faced head on. Whether international management researchers would be better served in meeting their ethical obligations if they had a code of ethics is unclear. Though it might send a signal to many parties, not least the researchers themselves, that ethics – and ethical conduct – is important, given the many different views around the world about just what constitutes ethical conduct, the product might be a rather bland document. It may be that the greatest value in developing a code of ethics – if some mechanism for that could be organized which took into account the very many perspectives that there are on what is ethical conduct – would be in the *process* of discussion and debate (including, consideration of the systemic causes of ethical misconduct and blindness) rather than the outcome. This certainly seems to have been the case when discussions took place about similar matters in the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology in the 1970s (Tapp/Kelman/Triandis/Wrightsman/Coelho 1974). If this paper, then, causes even some international management researchers to pause and consider the ethical aspects of what they do, it will have served an important purpose. If it also acts as a stimulus for a vigorous debate about these issues, then so much the better.

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