

COMMENTARY

The new age of ethics: University-led education and student-led discussion

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In their focal article, Banks et al. (2022) introduced an American Psychological Association (APA)-based ethical decision-making framework that members of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) should use when encountering ethical dilemmas. We agree that all SIOP members should follow this framework; however, we suggest taking a proactive approach to ethical dilemmas that incorporates academic institutions and student-led discussions before engaging in any of the steps of the proposed framework. Like the framework itself, this suggestion will enhance the elements of ethics educational training that, fortunately, are increasingly prevalent within industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology curricula.

Current state of ethical decision-making education

Banks et al. (2022) note that one of the goals of the SIOP Committee for the Advancement of Professional Ethics (CAPE) is to provide instructional resources that will aid I-O psychologists when making ethical decisions in the workplace in a manner that is aligned with the APA guidelines of (a) beneficence and nonmaleficence, (b) fidelity and responsibility, (c) integrity, (d) justice, and (e) respect for people's rights and dignity (APA, 2017). Yet in terms of typical graduate education in I-O psychology, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is often the main source of formal ethics training and one of the only formal exposures to ethics materials for graduate students, who are in the critical formative stages of their I-O psychology training. CITI training modules align closely with APA guidelines and offer a wide array of topics associated with academic roles such as assessing risk, conflicts of interest in human-subjects research, and research misconduct through readings, video modules, and online quizzes. Although CITI courses and modules are generally high quality and peer reviewed, there is currently a lack of empirical support for their effectiveness in mitigating unethical research behavior. Not only can modules be retaken as many times as necessary to pass, it is our anecdotal understanding that many researchers view CITI training as a perfunctory requirement rather than a learning opportunity, and they also have difficulty in relating many aspects of CITI ethics to their own organizational research. For instance, CITI training only offers one module that focuses on research involving employees (Rose & Pietri, 2003), and it is doubtful that all or even most I-O psychology researchers are exposed to that module.

Not only is information on the actual effectiveness of CITI generally lacking, but we also would assert an ongoing need for all I-O psychology researchers to engage in a continuous *process* of ethics-related training and conversations to promote optimal, ethical decision making in daily research/practice activities (as opposed to completing annual or biannual CITI modules). In some

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cases, completion of these modules is even less frequent (i.e., every 3 years). *SIOP Guidelines for Education and Training in Industrial-Organizational Psychology* specify “Ethical, Legal, Diversity, and International Issues” as a knowledge area that needs to be further developed in I-O psychology education (SIOP, 2016). To this end, we believe that there must be a push from academic institutions to incorporate ethics into their current I-O psychology curriculum, where I-O graduate students themselves engage in many forms of discussion on ethical decision-making processes in the context of I-O research being conducted. Our main point here is that a focus on improving ethics education is a foundational first step to Banks et al.’s (2022) proposed framework.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are threefold, focusing on prevention and education while also upholding the APA’s ethical guidelines. First, we believe that universities have an obligation to create an ethical culture through their policies and values. Second, we believe that I-O psychology graduate programs must integrate ethical issues into I-O graduate courses. University policies in conjunction with ethical I-O course content supplement a top-down approach for encouraging ethical behavior. Third, we believe that students should engage with a wide array of ethical topics relevant to research and practice domains to enrich their understanding and exploration of ethical issues. This latter recommendation supplements as a bottom-up approach for engaging students directly with such topics, thus covering ethical education from multiple angles.

University-wide recommendations

First, we recommend that universities create an ethical culture, starting by establishing clear mission statements that value ethical behavior. A university mission statement serves to formally define and communicate an organization’s values, priorities, and purposes (Bayrak, 2020). Craft (2018) suggests that connecting mission statements with strategic goals is essential for creating an ethical culture within organizations and for making employees more resilient in the face of ethical scenarios. Likewise, universities can underline the importance of ethics in mission statements to strategically guide the organization’s stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, researchers, staff) to be more ethically centered and value the importance of ethics in day-to-day study.

Second, we recommend university-wide honor codes, a set of guidelines that unify the ethical values of an academic institution, which have been shown to reduce academic dishonesty (McCabe & Treviño, 1993; McCabe et al., 2001). To be most effective, institutions should not only have an honor code; instructors should also discuss the importance and implications with students throughout a course (Bing et al., 2012). For example, instructors can remind students of the importance of academic integrity and ethical research conduct prior to administering exams. Honor codes are also more successful when organizations create a culture that values integrity and honesty (Dufresne, 2004). Thus, an ethical culture supplemented by a strong mission statement and honor codes may provide an ethical foundation for universities to build upon when promoting ethical decision making.

I-O psychology curricula structure

In terms of general course structure, we have several recommendations. First, we recommend revamping course syllabi to be aligned with APA guidelines (APA, 2018). A review of graduate syllabi from APA-accredited programs revealed a great discrepancy in content; about half did not have clear objective outcomes, mention of academic dishonesty, or an honor code, and about a quarter were not even in APA format (Griffith et al., 2014). Course syllabi set the intentions for a

class, and we encourage programs to provide strong guidance and diligence in adhering to the APA ethical guidelines from the beginning.

Second, it is apparent that despite the variety of ethical courses currently taught, there is a widespread lack of integration of ethics into core classes (e.g., Fiesler et al., 2020). However, research suggests that students may learn ethics better if it is integrated throughout a course. For example, Zuccherro (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental design with undergraduate students in four introductory psychology courses, two of which had ethics woven into course topics. He observed that students in courses with integrated ethical topics scored higher on a psychology ethics questionnaire and were better able to identify and respond to unethical scenarios. This is highly relevant to Banks et al. (2022) because it shows that ethical decision making in I-O psychology may be improved through an integrated approach to ethical training within undergraduate and graduate curricula.

Third, as a part of ethics coursework, instructors should actively support and teach open science, honesty, and transparency in research practices to students. It is no secret that the current incentive framework for publication frequently rewards statistically significant and “flashy” results, often over transparency in disclosing null results or, more generally, the underlying research process (Nosek et al., 2012). However, positive changes are happening in today’s open science era. For example, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and all APA core journals have recently adopted the Transparency and Openness Promotion (TOP) Guidelines (<https://www.cos.io/initiatives/top-guidelines>) to encourage the sharing of materials, data, and code while also educating authors on the benefits of study preregistration (Nosek et al., 2015). Instructors can further promote the future of open science and the ethical conduct of research by providing opportunities for students to preregister studies, submit materials online to the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/>), join professional organizations such as the Society for the Improvement of Psychological Science (SIPS; <https://improvingpsych.org/>), and respond to questions about their research practices such as when presenting projects, theses, and dissertations.

Fourth, instructors should use existing ethical resources. For example, SIOP provides free resources from CAPE (<https://www.siop.org/Career-Center/Professional-Ethics>) such as the Dilemma Deck (a series of cards with ethical scenarios used as a training tool), I-O Ethics Bingo, and I-O Ethics common misconceptions. These tools, among others, make it easier and more engaging for students to learn I-O ethics.

Student-led discussions and experiences

Students should engage, discuss, and debate ethical topics in their courses and practicum experiences. With ethics integrated and being taught within courses, encouraging conversation is a natural continuing step. Such discussion may be fruitful by helping students learn the material, express their ideas, and think more deeply about ethical topics. Furthermore, I-O psychology courses cover both research-focused and practitioner-focused coursework, which provide a novel opportunity to explore both scopes of the field that are not necessarily focused on in the CITI training.

Following the APA’s ethical guidelines, core classes within an I-O psychology program may include (and ethical topics potentially discussed) personnel psychology (e.g., artificial intelligence and machine learning in selection, affirmative action, reducing adverse impact), advanced statistics (e.g., avoiding *p*-hacking and other questionable research practices), research methods (e.g., confidentiality, informed consent, minimizing risk), and psychometrics (e.g., test fairness, ensuring reliable measures, providing transparency in scale development). As a practical exercise, I-O graduate students might select a study that provides data and attempt to replicate the authors’ analysis in the software of their choosing. Then, the student could post the replication and code to their OSF account and present the findings in a relevant class or seminar. Other graduate students

can then ask questions and comment on the replicability of the original study—relating findings to ethical points of discussion such as open science and replication. As another example, students may lead in-person discussions on current ethical dilemmas in organizations, such as employee vaccination requirements for COVID-19, and invite discussion from other classmates.

Furthermore, I-O graduate students can engage in practicum opportunities such as internships and part-time positions in which they apply their ethics-oriented education to their real-world experiences. For example, working as a human resources analyst may involve ethical dilemmas such as maintaining the confidentiality of HR records, properly managing employee databases, and following the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's demographic reporting requirements. Practicum experiences serve as a valuable experience by allowing students to directly apply their ethics knowledge and to handle novel ethical situations.

Ultimately, as the focal article discusses, ethical decision making involves weighing information, possible actions, and consequences, which can vary in scope and nature. Discussion and experience among students can inform ideas and prepare students to better handle ethical dilemmas that arise.

Conclusion

Teaching and integrating ethics can supplement and enrich existing coursework to benefit both sides of the scientist–practitioner model. If we as a field value and prioritize ethical behavior, it should show in how we educate I-O psychology graduate students—our next generation of researchers and practitioners. Through university-led initiatives, changes in the course content in I-O psychology, and student-led discussions, we believe that I-O psychology can be an example of how to support ethical decision making within both academic and practice areas.

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