

RESEARCH METHODS

Lecture Title:

Ethics and Professionalism in Research

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Masters in
Human Resources Management

Lecture's Outline

- Ethics and principles-led HRM
- HRM and the sustainability agenda
- Ethical practice in a digital age
- HR research and research ethics
- Important components of ethical research
- Research ethics at different stages of your project
- The positive features of ethical assessment processes



Ethics and Professionalism in Research

Why Ethics Matter

- Makes your research reliable and credible
- Supports professional standards in HR
- Helps create useful and meaningful knowledge

Participants

- Keep personal information private
- Give clear consent before any data is collected

Organisations

- Protect the organisation's reputation
- Use research evidence carefully and responsibly

HR Profession

- Act with honesty and fairness
- Show how research adds value to HR practice

Wider Stakeholders

- Consider your study centre, workplace, and wider community
- Be open, respectful and trustworthy

Ethical Scrutiny in HR Research

-  Why Most Projects Need Ethical Review
- You are working with real people (e.g. interviews, surveys, observations)
- You may access private or sensitive data (e.g. employee records, social media posts)
- You might collect emotional or personal information (e.g. trauma, mental health)
- There could be a conflict of interest (e.g. researching your own workplace)
-  Why Ethical Review Matters
- Protects you as the researcher
- Safeguards participants and organisations
- Builds trust in your research
- Helps you create a strong and meaningful project plan

Using Public Websites as Secondary Data

👍 Benefits

- Less ethical scrutiny – no private or personal data involved
- Easy access – information is already published and open to all
- Useful insights – shows how organisations present their values and policies

⚠️ Limitations

- Limited HR insight – may not show real employee experience or internal practices
- Risk of weak analysis – needs strong interpretation skills
- Often needs extra sources – adding HR documents or policies improves findings
- Must justify your method – explain clearly how this approach answers your research question

1. Ethics in HR Professional Practice

Why Ethics Matters

- Ethics is not just for research proposals — it shapes everyday HR decisions
- It affects how people see HR and the organisation
- Public trust in business is often low due to scandals and poor behaviour
- Ethical problems in companies raise serious questions about leadership and culture

HR and Ethical Conduct

- HR must respond to public demand for ethical and sustainable business
- The CIPD Profession Map helps guide decisions about right and wrong
- Many HR situations involve grey areas with no clear rule
- Acting ethically builds trust and strengthens professional standards

Ethics and Cultural Sensitivity in HR

Why It Matters

HR must balance cultural respect with universal principles of fairness and safety
Ethical choices affect the organisation's reputation and long-term trust

Be Culturally Sensitive

Respect local customs and expectations during HR research or practice

Right and Wrong Issues

Serious concerns include:

- Unsafe working conditions
- Exploitation and child labour
- Poor pay and discrimination

Different Ethical Positions

Cultural relativist – judge actions by local norms, not foreign standards

Realist – focus on business success, but recognise reputational risks

Moralist – believe unethical work is never acceptable, whatever the culture or cost

Ethics, Trust and HR Practice

- HR must be able to recognise and resolve ethical dilemmas
- Trust is essential for strong relationships with employees and stakeholders
- Professional bodies around the world highlight the need for ethical standards
- HR should take a visible role in promoting ethical, innovative and sustainable cultures
- Ethical frameworks help researchers plan and manage projects responsibly



Ethics and Principles-Led HRM in the 21st Century

Today's work and social life are complex and uncertain

Technology and social media shape how people communicate and work

Virtual, hybrid and home-based work bring benefits, but also risks like toxic cultures and pressure to be always available

After Covid-19, workers expect empathy, flexibility and better quality of life

Consumers now avoid unethical companies and demand honesty and transparency

Corporate scandals show why ethical behaviour is essential in organisations



Trust and Ethical Attitudes in HRM

Trust is now a key part of corporate and HR strategy

Customers prefer businesses they can trust

Employees expect honest and responsible leaders

Trust is built through values like honesty, fairness, respect and responsibility

These values shape the ethical attitude of individuals and organisations

Ethics means following principles about what people should or should not do

Ethics connects to morality, values and decision-making in HR



Ethics and Principles-Led HRM- Key Definitions

Adapted from *Remenyi et al. (2011); Werner (2022)*

- Ethics – principles about what is right and wrong in human behaviour
- Fairness – no favouritism; clear and transparent decisions
- Honesty – truthful and free from deception
- Morality – ideas of right and wrong conduct
- Principles – basic rules or beliefs that guide behaviour
- Respect – recognising the feelings and rights of others
- Responsibility – being accountable and trustworthy
- Trust – confidence in someone's character or ability
- Values – core beliefs that shape how people behave

Principles-Led HRM (CIPD Guidance)

Why It Matters

- Ethical concerns in HRM are growing
- HR must respond to complex and changing situations
- Guidance helps professionals act with integrity and fairness

CIPD Approach (2015)

- Promotes principles-led HRM as the foundation for good practice
- Encourages ethical decision-making in different contexts
- Supports trust, professionalism and sustainable cultures

Workplace Behaviour and Ethics

⚠️ Unethical Behaviour Is Common

- Many employees have seen or experienced unethical conduct
- Examples include dishonesty, unfair treatment, discrimination and harassment

👥 Different Perspectives

- Employees – want trust, honesty and fairness
- General public – concerned about tax avoidance, discrimination and environmental impact
- HR professionals – focus on fairness in recruitment, pay, promotion and diversity

🤔 Why It's Tolerated

- Power imbalances and conflicts of interest
- Weak accountability in some organisations
- Ethical standards change over time — what was acceptable before may now be wrong

📏 Professional Standards

- HR has lacked clear standards compared to law or medicine
- Ethical codes and ISO/BSI standards now guide HR practice (since 2011)
- These standards are voluntary but still important — they do not excuse poor behaviour

Professional Codes of Ethics in HRM

- Professional bodies have published codes of ethics and conduct to guide HR practice. Examples include:
- AHRD – ethical standards for HR development
- ATD – vision, mission and code of ethics for talent development
- BCS – professional conduct standards for IT professionals
- CIPD – code of conduct for HR members
- EMCC – ethics in mentoring and coaching
- SHRM – code of ethics for HR professionals

Source

- Adapted from professional codes published by AHRD, ATD, BCS, CIPD, EMCC and SHRM

International Standards for HRM (ISO/TC 260)

- Selected ISO standards that support ethical and professional HR practice:
- ISO 30415:2021 – Diversity and inclusion
- ISO 30408:2016 – Human governance guidelines
- ISO 30422:2022 – Learning and development
- ISO 30405:2016 – Recruitment guidelines
- ISO 30409:2016 – Workforce planning

 Source

Based on selected ISO/TC 260 standards (2016–2022)

HR Professionals' Principles-Led Ethics

Based on the CIPD Code of Professional Conduct (2023) and the CIPD Profession Map:

- Challenge misconduct – act if you see unlawful or unethical behaviour
- Personal ethical behaviour – show trust, respect, honesty, integrity and dignity
- Work as a force for good – promote safe, inclusive and socially responsible employment
- Balance priorities – match economic goals with social accountability
- Principles-led HRM – follow minimum standards that go beyond short-term competitiveness
- Professional values – fairness, responsibility, transparency and ethical practice

 Source

Based on CIPD Code of Professional Conduct (2023) and CIPD Profession Map



2. HRM and Sustainability

- HRM must integrate sustainability into everyday practice
- Balance economic goals with social and environmental responsibility
- Recognise both progress and criticism in how organisations behave

Sources

Koch, Kabisch & Krellenberg (2017); Waite (2014); Elkington (1998); Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013); GRI (2022); ISO (2017); Christian Aid (2004); Gray (2006); Vogt & Weber (2019)

HRM and the Sustainability Agenda

- The CIPD Profession Map says HR must reflect the global shift towards sustainability
- HR should challenge old strategies based on unlimited production and consumption
- The Triple Bottom Line balances economic, social and environmental priorities
- The Circular Economy rebuilds natural and social capital through restorative practices
- Global standards like GRI and ISO 26000/IWA 26:2017 promote social responsibility
- Public and political support for sustainability reporting is growing
- Critics say real change in business practice is still limited

Sources

Koch, Kabisch & Krellenberg (2017); Waite (2014); Elkington (1998); Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013); GRI (2022); ISO (2017); Christian Aid (2004); Gray (2006); Vogt & Weber (2019)

Social Responsibility and HR

- HR supports sustainability — not just environmental, but also social and community wellbeing
- Focus on human sustainability: fair treatment, wellbeing and respect for communities
- HR can shape culture, involve stakeholders and go beyond basic legal compliance
- The goal is to balance efficiency with wellbeing and serve the common good

 Source

Adapted from HRM and sustainability literature (e.g. Koch et al., Waite, Elkington, ISO, GRI)

Social Responsibility and HR

HR supports organisational learning and culture change to embed sustainability beyond basic compliance

Align operational efficiency with wellbeing and development to protect workers and communities

Stakeholders to Engage

- Employees
- Health and wellbeing specialists
- Local communities
- Welfare organisations
- Regulators

HR Practice Priorities

- Fair treatment and association rights
- Employee health, safety and work–family balance
- Learning and development to build sustainability awareness
- Leadership programmes for responsible and sustainable management

Source

Adapted from HRM and sustainability literature (e.g. Koch et al., Waite, Elkington, ISO, GRI)

Social Responsibility and HR

HR must look beyond traditional labour practices

- Social responsibility includes human rights, fair operating practices and community development
- A principles-led approach helps HR promote ethical and sustainable people management
- HR's role now includes supply chains and non-standard workers (e.g. contractors, gig workers)
- The goal is to build healthy, motivated people and support organisational sustainability

Sources

ISO 26000; Boudreau & Ramstad (2005); Ardichvili (2007, 2012)



Social Responsibility and HR

Expanding HR Priorities

- ISO 26000 guidance challenges HR to think beyond traditional labour practices
 - Labour practices fit existing HR roles
 - Human rights and fair operating practices may feel outside HR's remit

New HR Paradigm (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005)

- Includes environmental protection and community development
- Progress is limited, but commitment to sustainability is growing

Principles-Led HRM

- Opportunities to embed socially responsible practices
- Requires attention to supply chains and contracted workers

Implications for HR Leaders

- Promote sustainability through people management
- Develop high-quality, motivated and healthy human resources
- Balance organisational efficiency with social responsibility

Sources

ISO 26000; Boudreau & Ramstad (2005); Ardichvili (2007, 2012)

3. Ethical Practice in a Digital Age

- Digital technology and big data have transformed HR work
- Recruitment, selection and employer branding are now managed through digital platforms
- Covid-19 increased the use of virtual workplaces and surveillance tools
- HR analytics can improve efficiency — but also brings serious ethical risks
- The key challenge is to balance the benefits of technology with respect for people's rights

Sources

Parry & Strohmeier (2014); Edwards et al. (2022)

Ethical Practice in a Digital Age

HR analytics uses data from emails, HR systems, IT, sales and external surveys

- Surveillance software grew during remote work in the pandemic
- Key ethical concerns include:
 - Privacy and consent
 - Data governance and autonomy
 - Risk of discrimination from algorithm-based decisions (e.g. training, pay, promotion)
- A blind spot for HR: advanced analytics may ignore ethical impacts and harm diversity and inclusion

Lesson for HR:

- Trial and review digital tools before use
- Ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in all data-driven decisions



Digitisation and Employment Based on CIPD (2021) guidance:

- HR must manage digital data security with care
- HR analytics will strongly influence decisions over the next five years
- Digital tools offer benefits — but also bring ethical risks
- HR must balance efficiency with privacy, fairness and trust



Data Security Challenges

- Data protection needs regular review and updates
- Risks increase when employees use multiple devices
- Contractors, partners and gig workers also need secure network access
- Many organisations use cloud apps without strong security checks
- Cybersecurity incidents show how vulnerable organisations can be

 Source CIPD (2021)

HR Analytics – Future Impact

- Can measure engagement, retention and turnover
- Compare performance, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion
- Assess how HR policies affect workforce outcomes
- Forecast the financial and social return of HR initiatives
- Offers big opportunities — but needs clear governance

 Source- CIPD (2021)

Ethical Issues in Digital HR

- Privacy and consent – how personal data is collected and used
- Transparency – explain how data is scraped and shared
- Surveillance risks – monitoring social media may feel intrusive
- Workplace learning – digital platforms may risk confidentiality
- Balance needed – cost savings must be weighed against respect for people's rights

 Source- CIPD (2021)

4. HR Research and Research Ethics

- HR research must always follow ethical standards
- Protect participants' privacy, dignity and wellbeing
- Be clear about the purpose, methods and outcomes
- Avoid or declare any conflicts of interest
- Ensure honesty, independence and accountability throughout the research process

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Key Ethical Issues in HR Research

- Survey design – questions must be fair, relevant and respectful
- Participant safety – avoid emotional harm or pressure to take part
- Consent and transparency – clearly explain how data will be used
- Confidentiality – keep promises and secure data properly
- Independence – stay free from organisational bias or influence

📖 Source - Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Good Practice in HR Research

- Give participants clear information about the study
- Use informed consent before collecting any data
- Explain who owns the data and how it will be kept secure
- Define responsibility and accountability — between the organisation, supervisor and researcher
- Make sure the research maximises benefits and minimises harm

Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research (e.g. CIPD, 2021)



Guiding Questions for Ethical Research

- What is the purpose of your research?
- How will you answer your questions?
- How will you protect yourself and your participants?
- How will you ensure honesty and openness?
- What will your findings be used for?
- Will participants be no worse off after taking part?

Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research (e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Data Security and HR Research

- GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) sets strict rules for using personal data in research
- You must get explicit consent from participants
- Data can only be used for the stated purpose
- Data must be stored securely and kept only for a limited time
- Participants have the right to access and correct their data
- 📖 Source- CIPD (2021)

Using Secondary Data (Company-Held)

- You cannot assume permission just because the company holds the data
- Sensitive employee data needs explicit consent from those involved
- Exceptions apply only to public health, statistical, historical or scientific research
- Data must not be shared beyond its original purpose

 Source- CIPD (2021)

Using Primary Data (Interviews & Surveys)

- Get active and informed consent from all participants
- Explain clearly how data will be collected, stored, used and destroyed
- If full anonymity isn't possible, explain use of pseudonyms
- Say clearly if data is only for a dissertation or report, not for wider publication
- If future use is planned, participants must give explicit consent

 Source- CIPD (2021)

Practical GDPR Requirements

- Set a clear time limit for holding personal data
- Use secure methods to dispose of data after that time
- Store data with password protection and other security safeguards
- Provide transcripts if requested and allow corrections
- Ensure transparency at every stage of the research process



Source- CIPD (2021)

5. Ethical Commitments to Participants

- Anonymity means hiding the identity of people or organisations in research
- It protects privacy, builds trust, and shows respect in research relationships
- Participants have the right to know how anonymity will be used
- Researchers must consider both individual anonymity and organisational anonymity



Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Anonymity – Limits

- In small groups or with high-profile individuals, full anonymity may not be possible
- Identities can sometimes be guessed, even if names are not included
- Some participants may accept this if it is explained clearly
- These limits must be addressed honestly during the planning stage

 Source -Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research (e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Anonymity – Options for Participants

Participants may choose to:

- Remain anonymous
- Be named openly in the research
- Use a pseudonym (false name)
- These choices must be agreed before data collection begins
- Clear communication builds confidence and respect



Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Confidentiality in HR Research

Confidentiality means keeping data safe from unauthorised access

- Participants must know who will see their information
- They must agree to how their data will be used and shared
- Builds trust and respect in the research process

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Data Storage in HR Research

Confidential and sensitive data must be protected from unauthorised access

- Use secure storage methods — such as passwords, locked files or protected systems
- Tell participants how long their data will be stored and where
- Explain clearly how data will be disposed of securely after the project ends

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research (e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Dignity and Wellbeing in HR Research

Research must not cause distress, embarrassment or harm

- Show respect for differences in gender, background, language and experience
- Avoid any process that makes participants feel stupid, judged or excluded
- Ethical research protects the wellbeing and dignity of everyone involved

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research (e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Ethical Issues in HR Research – Different Stakeholder Perspectives

HR research affects many different groups

- Each group has its own ethical concerns
- Researchers must balance all perspectives fairly
- Core principles: consent, confidentiality, transparency, and respect

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Participants' Perspective

- Protect wellbeing – avoid distress, embarrassment or discomfort
- Respect privacy and ensure voluntary consent
- Provide confidentiality and anonymity wherever possible
- Consider the time commitment – is it during work hours or personal time?
- Minimise disruption to daily life or work routines

 Source -Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Organisation's Perspective in HR Research

- Protect the organisation's reputation
- Avoid disruption to working patterns
- Follow internal ethical policies (e.g. data protection rules)
- Get consent from the appropriate authority before collecting data
- Decide whether the organisation will be named or kept anonymous

📖 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Study Centre Perspective in HR Research

- Protect the reputation of the study centre
- Ensure compliance with policies on data protection, diversity, and ethics
- Consider researcher safety during data collection
- Support ethical standards in student research projects

📖 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

HR Researcher Perspective

- Be aware of power relationships with colleagues
- Keep a clear boundary between your role as researcher and practitioner
- Make sure colleagues feel free to decline participation
- Encourage truthful responses without pressure or influence
- Maintain fairness and stay independent throughout the research

 Source- Adapted from ethical guidance for HR research
(e.g. CIPD, 2021)

Key Ethical Principles

- Gain all permissions before starting research
- Involve participants – let them help shape enquiry
- Negotiate access – never assume it will be given
- Be open about progress – address concerns early
- Never observe without explicit permission
- Get consent before using files or documents
- Report back fairly – allow participants to suggest corrections
- Take responsibility for confidentiality and data security



Important Components of Ethical Research

Online Research

- Covid-19 showed how digital tools are central to research
- Online platforms create new opportunities but also social challenges
- HR researchers now often use surveys and interviews through Zoom or MS Teams
- Digital methods are now a normal part of HR research practice

Online Research – Opportunities

- Easier access to participants when face-to-face is not possible
- Saves time and resources compared to traditional methods
- Allows research across different locations quickly
- Expands options – e.g. using social media platforms to reach participants



Online Research – Challenges

- Online interaction may feel less personal or harder to build trust
- Risk of technical problems during interviews or surveys
- Issues of privacy and data security when using digital platforms
- Need to ensure participants understand how their data will be used



Using Online Sources for HR Research

General Perspectives

- Online platforms can provide insights from different groups (HR professionals, employees, job seekers, students)
- Common platforms: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Reddit, LinkedIn, X (Twitter)
- Choice of platform depends on audience, location and relevance
- Ethical issues to consider:
 - Informed consent – participants must know how their data will be used
 - Confidentiality – protect privacy when using online information
 - Avoid misuse of personal posts or data without permission



Using Online Data in HR Research

- Three Main Approaches (Salmons, 2021)
- HR research can use online data in different ways
- Three approaches:
 - Use of existing online sources
 - Eliciting data by asking questions online
 - Generating data through online communication during the study



Approach 1 – Existing Online Sources

- Data already available online, not influenced by researcher
- Examples:
 - Employers' descriptions of what they want in applicants
 - Students' social media comments about internship experiences
- Useful for analysing patterns and themes in existing content



Approach 2 – Eliciting Data via Online Media

- Researcher asks participants questions online
- Examples:
 - What motivates people to apply for internships?
 - Why do organisations offer internships?
 - How does HR manage and evaluate internships?
- Useful for gathering direct responses from participants



Approach 3 – Generating Data Through Online Communication

- Researcher interacts with participants during the study
- Examples:
 - How internship experiences change over time
 - Work-life balance and wellbeing issues for interns
 - Knowledge-sharing between HR professionals using online tools
- Useful for studying processes and changes over time



Ethical Issues in Online Research

- Public vs Private Data
- Not all social media data is truly publicly available
- Boundaries between public and private spaces are uncertain
- Researchers must apply situational ethics and an ethics of care approach
- Written consent is needed for elicited data (e.g. online interviews, text chats)
- Some participants may agree to be named but many prefer anonymity to avoid risks



Ethical Issues in Online Research

- Data Quality Challenges
- Online research faces risks such as:
 - Fake profiles
 - Trolling
 - Bot-generated posts
- These issues affect the quality and reliability of data
- Researchers must check sources carefully and be cautious in analysis



Ethical Issues in Online Research

- Online research needs explicit ethical consideration
- Must be included in ethical approval and methodology
- Six main areas:
 - Adequate information
 - Privacy
 - Informed consent
 - Anonymity and confidentiality
 - Legal issues
 - Participant vulnerability



Adequate Information

- Participants must clearly understand:
 - What data will be gathered
 - Timing, setting and duration of the project
 - How data and findings will be used
- Clear communication builds trust and transparency

Privacy

- Decide what counts as public vs private data
- Social media boundaries are often uncertain
- Ethical stance must be explained in your project
- Respect participants' expectations of privacy

Informed Consent

- Must negotiate and achieve consent online
- Provide clear information and FAQs for participants
- Consent is needed for online interviews, chats, or surveys
- Participation must always be voluntary



Anonymity and Confidentiality

- Check if platforms collect IP addresses
- Consider implications for participant privacy
- Steps must be taken to anonymise qualitative data from social media
- Protect both individuals and organisations

Legal Issues

- Participants sign up to Terms of Service (ToS) on platforms
- ToS affects ownership of data
- Researchers must respect platform rules and legal boundaries
- Be aware of implications for using and storing data



Participant Vulnerability

- Online research can reach hard-to-access groups
- Includes young people, elderly, or those with health problems
- Must take extra care to avoid harm or exploitation
- Protect dignity, wellbeing and safety of vulnerable participants



6. Research Ethics at Different Stages

- Three Key Stages
- Ethical issues arise throughout the research process
- Stages to consider:
 - Research design and planning
 - During data gathering
 - After data gathering
- Each stage requires careful thought and responsibility



Ethical Issues During Research Design and Planning

- Before You Start
- Decide how you will recruit and approach participants
- Ask: Who benefits from this research? Who might be affected negatively?
- Plan for informed consent – explain clearly what the research involves
- Get organisational permission if needed
- Check for conflicts of interest – are you too close to the topic or people?
- Be careful when working with vulnerable groups (e.g. young people, those with health issues)
- Consider the role of gatekeepers – people who control access to participants



Ethical Issues During Data Gathering

While Collecting Information

- Keep all data confidential and secure
- Record and store data safely (e.g. password protection, locked files)
- Respect participants who wish to withdraw at any time
- Follow data protection laws and good practice
- Use fair and respectful data collection methods
- Be prepared for incidental findings – unexpected information that may need attention
- Keep a clear data audit trail – show how data was collected and handled

Ethical Issues After Data Gathering

When the Research Is Finished

- Use data carefully and fairly in your analysis
- Share findings with participants, sponsors or your study centre if appropriate
- Dispose of data securely when no longer needed
- Watch for unplanned consequences – how might your findings affect others?
- Reflect on what you've learned about ethical practice for future research

Informed Consent in Ethical Research

- All people and organisations involved must know:
 - Why they were chosen
 - What the research involves
- Privacy and data protection must be respected
- Consent must be informed, not just assumed
- Taking part in an interview or focus group does not mean consent has been given

Informed Consent – Organisation's Perspective

- Consent must be clearly given, not just assumed because you work there
- Organisation must understand:
 - Purpose of the research
 - Who is doing it and who to contact with questions
 - What to expect – type of data, methods, time commitment
 - Anonymity and confidentiality arrangements
 - How data will be used and who will see the results
 - Whether the project fits with company policies or codes



Informed Consent – Individual Participants

- Individual consent is separate from organisational consent
- Each person must decide freely whether to take part
- You must explain clearly:
 - What the study involves
 - What will happen to their data
 - Their right to withdraw at any time
- Use simple, clear language – avoid academic jargon
- Prepare two documents:
 - One for the organisation
 - One for individual participants

Informed Consent

- Informed consent means participants know and understand what the research involves
- Consent must be voluntary and based on clear information
- Both the organisation and individual participants must give consent
- Information must be written in simple, clear language



Basic Information for Participants

- Who is doing the project (name, contact details)
- Which study centre is supervising the research
- Title of the project
- Who to contact if there are complaints (supervisor or ethics committee)
- Purpose of the project explained in plain English

What Participation Involves

- What contribution is requested (questionnaire, interview, etc.)
- Type of data to be collected
- Time commitment – how long, how many times, over what period
- Why the participant has been asked to take part
- When the information will be gathered (work time or own time)

Data Handling and Privacy

- How information will be gathered (methods)
- How it will be recorded and stored securely
- Confidentiality arrangements – who will see the data
- Anonymity arrangements – will names be hidden?
- What happens if someone does not want to participate
- What will happen to the data after the project (storage and disposal)



Reporting and Outcomes

- How findings will be reported (dissertation, business report, other formats)
- Procedures to protect confidentiality and anonymity in reports
- Possible disadvantages – state clearly if none are expected
- Benefits – who will gain and in what way (organisation, employees, researchers)
- Who has reviewed the study for ethical standards (study centre, organisation)



Rights of Participants

- Permission can be withdrawn after being granted
- Explain if there is a point when data cannot be separated from the dataset
- Participants can refuse to answer any question
- Participation must always be voluntary and respectful

Ethical Issues in the Data Gathering Phase

- Right to withdraw – participants and organisations can stop at any time without penalty
- Stick to the plan – follow the stated purpose and agreed data gathering methods
- Accurate recording – collect and record data fully, honestly and transparently
- Confidentiality and anonymity – keep promises made to protect identities and sensitive information
- Fair treatment – avoid putting participants under pressure or making them feel less valued
- Respect participants' dignity and self-esteem throughout the process

Ethical Issues After Data Gathering

- Ethics continue after data collection
- Concerns about anonymity and confidentiality remain important
- Researchers must act with honesty, fairness and responsibility
- Reporting and disposal of data also have ethical implications



Accuracy and Fairness in Analysis

- Data must be collected and recorded accurately
- Interpretations must be fair and balanced
- Report findings honestly – do not hide inconvenient results
- Remain open to alternative explanations of the data
- Avoid bias or selective reporting



Sharing Results with Organisations

- Participants or sponsors may request interim reports
- Reasonable to provide summaries if organisation supported the project
- Do not rush to meet deadlines with partial results
- Partial reporting can lead to misinterpretation
- Always present findings carefully and in full context



Anonymity and Permission

- Respect commitments to organisational anonymity
- Organisations or individuals can only be named with explicit consent
- They may request to read parts of the report before agreeing
- Revisions may be required to protect reputation and context

Disposal and Retention of Data

- For student projects, data usually disposed of after assessment
- Dispose securely: shred paper, delete or wipe files
- Sometimes data may be retained for:
 - Follow-up surveys
 - Conference presentations or journal articles
 - Donation to a data repository for future research
- If retained, ensure privacy and remove all identifiers
- Obtain participant permission for future use



7. Ethical Assessment – Possible Objections

- Students may feel it is bureaucratic and unnecessary
- Delay in starting the project can cause frustration
- Preparing documents may seem time-consuming and daunting
- Organisations may be impatient for results and see the process as a barrier



Ethical Assessment – Positive Features

- Builds confidence – researcher knows they have thought ahead
- Anticipates possible implications for participants
- Helps answer participant questions clearly
- Encourages discussion of sampling strategy and data recording methods
- Leads to better planning and quality research
- Helps avoid mistakes that might occur without careful preparation



Why Ethical Assessment Matters

- Protects participants' rights and wellbeing
- Ensures confidentiality and anonymity are considered in advance
- Clarifies data storage and disposal plans
- Strengthens trust between researcher, organisation and supervisor
- Provides a robust foundation for the dissertation or report



Ethical Assessment Process

- What Students Must Do
- Find out the ethical assessment requirements of your study centre
- Obtain and complete the required forms
- Identify:
 - The main issues behind the questions asked
 - The level of permission needed for your research
- If researching in your own organisation:
 - Check if there are ethical policies or forms
 - Learn how to obtain organisational approval



Key Ethical Issues in Assessment

- Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants and organisations
- Protecting dignity and wellbeing of participants
- Considering relationships with organisations, sponsors and gatekeepers
- Ensuring research is fair, respectful and responsible



Levels of Ethical Scrutiny

- Institutions may apply different levels of review depending on:
 - Undergraduate vs postgraduate studies
 - Staff vs research degree projects
- Ethical scrutiny may be carried out by:
 - Tutor or course leader
 - Formal ethics committee (slower process)



Advantages and Disadvantages

- Advantages:
 - Stronger, more robust research design
 - Anticipates ethical issues early
 - Builds skills as an ethical HR practitioner
- Disadvantages:
 - Can be slow and time-consuming
 - May delay project start
 - Pressure from organisations wanting quick results



Why Ethical Assessment Matters

- Ethics is now a fundamental feature of HR research
- Not an optional extra – part of good practice
- Careful ethical planning improves:
 - Quality of research
 - Trust with participants and organisations
 - Professional credibility



Thank you
for
your
attention!

