Strategies for providing effective, ethical guidance and support to students

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Learning outcomes

1. Reflecting on strategies to enhance the postgraduate student's ethical sensitivity, skills & competence

2. As a supervisor, how could I act as a coast guard for promoting the ethical preparedness of postgraduate students? (being, knowing and doing activities)
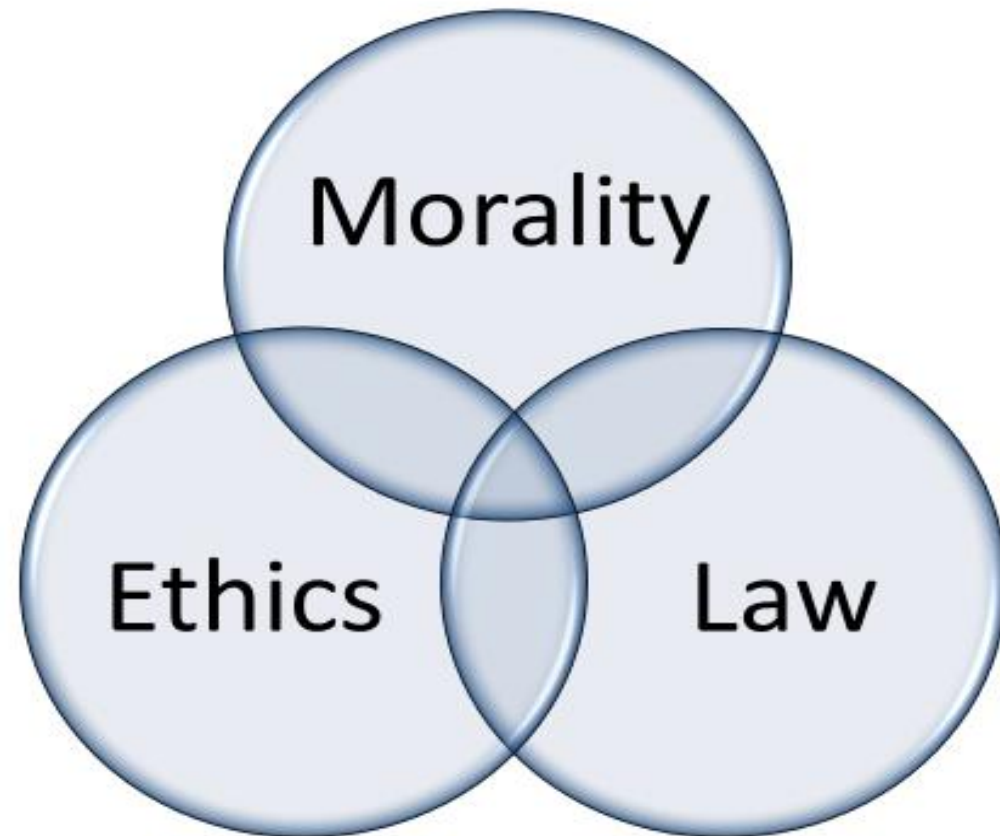
Introduction

The supervisory support that we give is aligned to:

- How we show up as supervisors in contributing to ethical and rigorous research

- How we show up as a collective

- How we show up as an institution

Research ethics is about …

Integrity is at the centre ...

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What are the various dimensions of integrity in the supervisor-postgraduate student relationship?

Integrity is at the centre ...

- Integrity is a personal quality that goes beyond honesty.
- Personal = morally honourable behaviour internally consistent in actions and principles
- Collective = a group's state of being a united whole, meaning the group norms and conduct operate in harmony.
- Text = Is it logical, comprehensive and free of contradictions that can call into question its veracity? (Collins Dictionary, 2023)
- Institutional = consistent and evolving initiatives to foster responsible research conduct and ensure high-calibre, dependable and reliable research output

THE SUPERVISOR AS A 'COASTGUARD' IN THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

- The number of doctoral graduates per million in a country is commonly used to indicate a country's progress towards attaining the high-level competence needed for innovation and growth in productivity (Khuluvhe et al., 2021, p. 14).

- The throughput rate of doctoral candidates is closely associated with their methodological preparedness, for which doctoral supervision is one of the key antecedents.

- Students and supervisors share the world of supervision

Thani, X. C., Wessels, J. S., & Visagie, R. G. (2023). The supervisor as a 'coastguard' in the methodological preparedness of doctoral candidates. Teaching Public Administration. https://doi.org/10.1177_01447394231180281

THE SUPERVISOR AS A 'COASTGUARD' IN THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

- A recent study on supervisory qualities amongst 698 doctoral students of all disciplines across 15 Australian universities revealed that these students value "human traits consistent with emotional intelligence and … the professional aspects of supervision especially in relation to the research process" (Davis, 2019, p. 432).

- Furthermore, the students valued the supervisor's role in "setting goals and deadlines in the context of realistic expectations and a clear sense of intellectual engagement and support" (Davis,2019: 447).

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Supervisor-student relationship founded on:

- candidate's perceptions of guidance through the formal research

- process towards completion,

- feedback on submitted work,

- theoretical and methodological advice, scholarly mentoring, and emotional support

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Critical strategies

- Be knowledgeable as a supervisor
- Communication
- Advice = grow your students' independent thinking
- Direction
- Feedback
- Mentorship

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THE SUPERVISOR AS A 'COASTGUARD' IN THE METHODOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

The functions of real-life coastguards have been well-documented:

- ⦿ regulation to ensure marine safety preparedness for catastrophic threats (be aware of the potential unpreparedness of the student),

- ⦿ conducting emergency search and rescue operations (identify 'at risk' candidates and challenges early),

- ⦿ navigating assistance, and

- ⦿ providing humanitarian and international assistance to vessels (close connection, cooperation and communication)

(Alfultis, 2007, p. 3; Gibson, 1998, p. 3; Harkins, 2007, p. 44; Kammer, 2011, p. 4; United States Government Accountability Office, 2010, p. 29)

Q for reflection

How did your supervisor show up during your Master's and/ or Doctoral study to guide you on the ethics of the study?
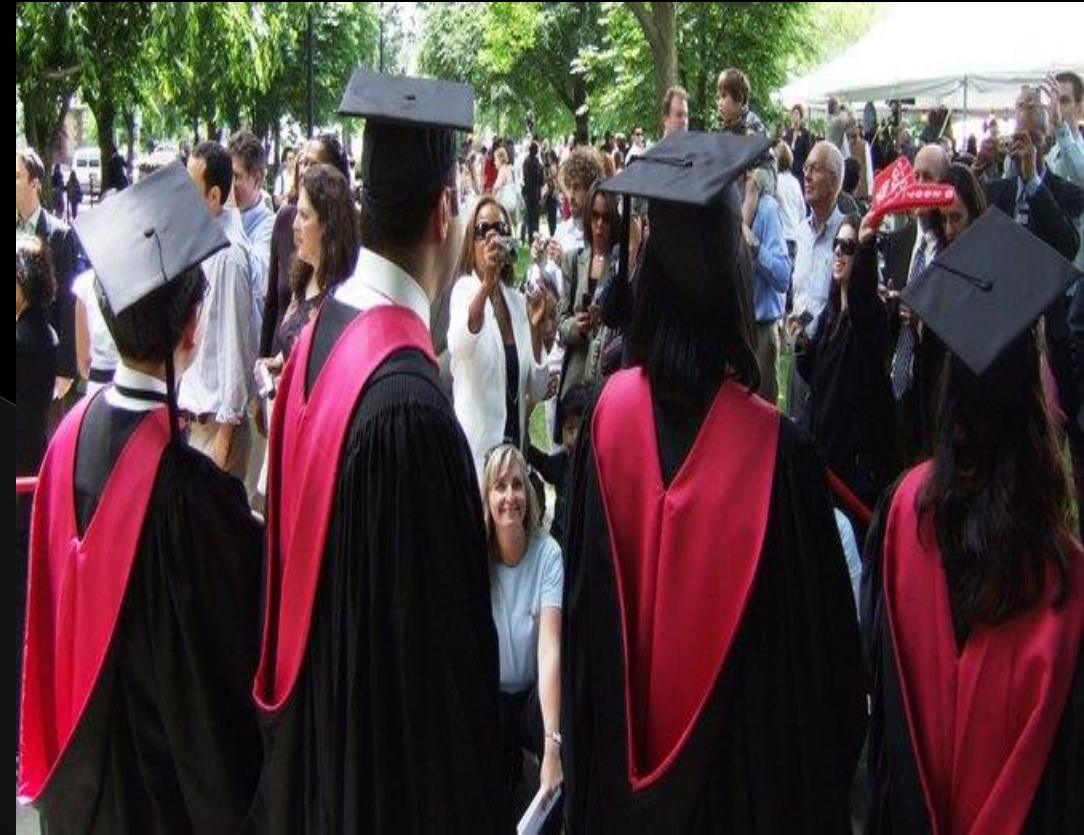
Q for reflection

How are you showing up as a postgraduate supervisor to guide your students on the ethics of their research?

MORAL
SOCIOLOGIA
BIOLOGIA
QUÍMICA
FÍSICA
ASTRONOMIA
MATEMÁTICA

Personal photograph, Prof WA Hoffmann, Santa Teresa District, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 25 Sep 2015

Cannabis study

- Focus of the study is on Policy development
- Student interviewed various groups of individuals, including those that are producing and selling cannabis
- Illegal activity
- Risk threshold increased in the field due to competing roles – researcher vs being a voice for participants
- Concerned and caring supervisor
- Committed and dedicated student

Reflections of a Master's student

"I feel more rigorous support could be given to students who are facing difficulties arising from evolving study contexts, and that they should be supported by … where they are potentially able to make significant contributions to social, or scientific developments, even if the going gets tough, and they do not 'possess the correct qualification". Formal qualification can, in some cases be relative and supplemented by life experience. Only through facing and considering the really difficult, and sometimes obscure social contexts, will we make any true progress as a society. Our academic institutions need to be at the forefront of these types of research contexts. But for that, they also need to be prepared to back students. This will take more rigorous and concerted engagement".

Supervisor reflections

1. When do you talk about research ethics with your postgraduate students?
2. What do you perceive to be critical information about research ethics to share with your students?
3. Do you discuss research ethics when the methodology is considered?
4. How involved are you during the research ethics application process?
5. What do you think your student should know about research ethics?
6. What do you think your students should know about being an ethical researcher?
7. Where does your responsibility as a supervisor begin and where does it end?
8. On a scale from 0 – 10, where 0 indicates no confidence and 10 indicates optimal confidence, how confident are you that you have the necessary RE knowledge, skills and competence to mentor your students?

Primary role of a Supervisor

- Principal researchers and/or academic supervisors oversee the ethical conduct of research by junior researchers, members of a research team, assistants, students and trainees under their supervision.

- Supervisors must be suitably qualified to provide the necessary guidance to students.

- Supervisors guiding students conducting health research should produce evidence of appropriate research ethics training within the previous three years (see DOH, Ethics in Health Research, 2015, section 2.3.8).

Unisa Policy on Research Ethics, 2022 (Currently under review)

Responsibilities

- Promoting the ethical conduct of their students
- Continued professional development and staying abreast with new developments
- Ensuring that students understand their responsibilities as researchers
- Facilitating students competency & confidence (training, mentoring, pastoral care, consultation)
- Preparing students to apply for RE (methodology, ethical principles, policies)
- Being familiar with Unisa's policies and SOPs
- Reviewing the quality and completeness of the ethics application
- Conducting an adequate risk assessment and discuss the researcher's safety (distress protocol)

Responsibilities
After REC approval

- Promoting discussions of any concerns that might arise & sensitivity to continuing responsibilities

- Reporting of adverse events

- Ensuring that approval is sought for study amendments / changes to consent forms/ instruments

- Submitting reports

- Retaining records

Potential ethical issues throughout the life cycle of a study

Prior to conducting a study:

- ⦿   Examine professional accepted standards/principles
- ⦿   Identify a research problem that will benefit participants
- ⦿   Clear aim and purpose
- ⦿   Seek ethics approval
- ⦿   Gain local permission from the site and consent from the participants
- ⦿   Select a site without a vested interest in the outcome of the study
- ⦿   Negotiate authorship

Creswell, JW & Creswell, JD (2018) Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches Angeles: SAGE

Potential ethical issues throughout the life cycle of a study

Beginning the study
- Do not pressure participants to take part
- Respect norms and cultures or participant groups
- Be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations
- Collecting data
- Respect the site and disrupt as little as possible – build trust
- Fair treatment
- Avoid deceiving participants – discuss the purpose and how data will be used
- Respect power imbalances and exploitation
- Do not use participants – gather data and leave
- Avoid collecting harmful information

Creswell, JW & Creswell, JD (2018) Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches Angeles: SAGE

Potential ethical issues throughout the life cycle of a study

Analyzing data

- Remain neutral – reporting multiple perspectives
- Avoid disclosing only positive results
- Respect privacy and confidentiality – fictitious names, aliases, aggregated reporting

Creswell, JW & Creswell, JD (2018) Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches Angeles: SAGE

What should I consider during the various stages of the research study?

Research Ethics Governances Framework

- Universal codes and principles foundational to decision making

- Standards for review - benchmarks

Ethical principles

Ethical requirements

Statutory responsibility

Special considerations
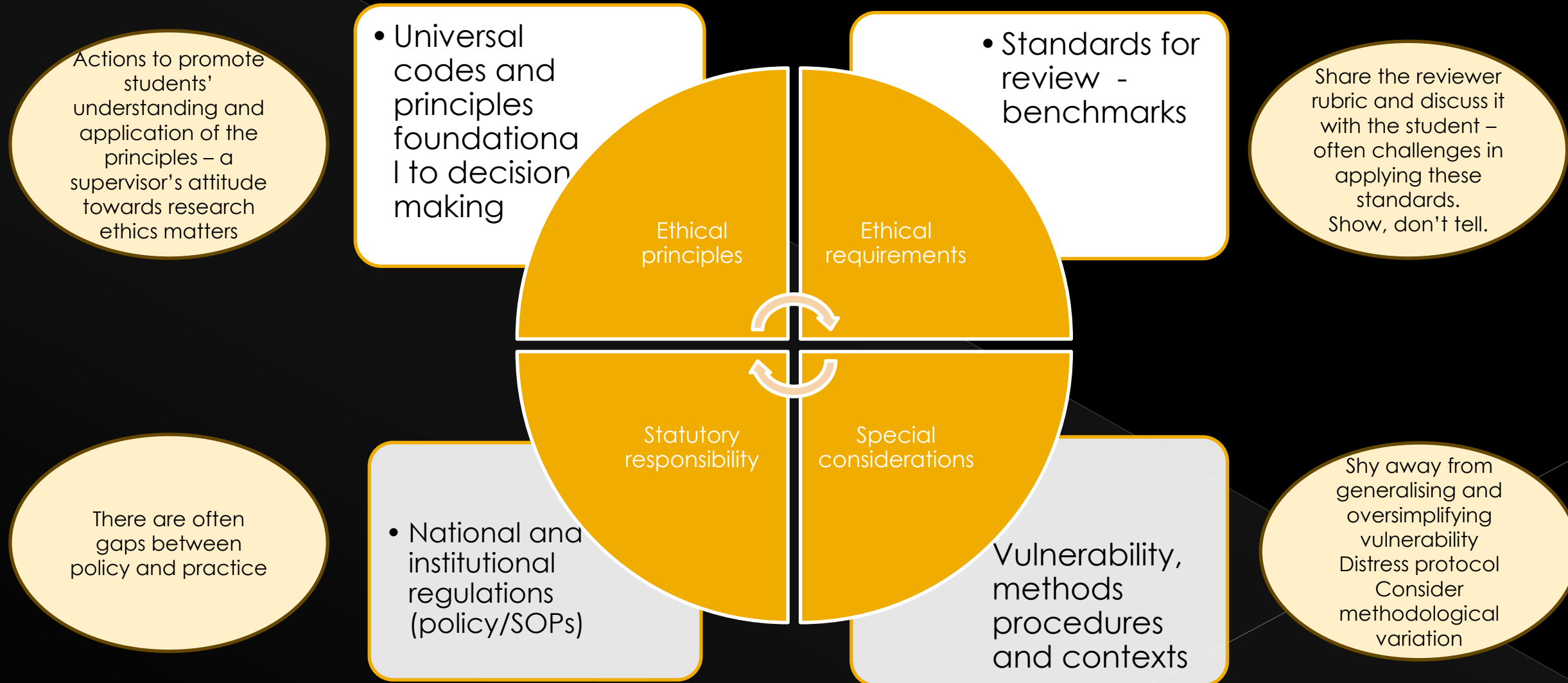
Actions to promote students' understanding and application of the principles – a supervisor's attitude towards research ethics matters

Share the reviewer rubric and discuss it with the student – often challenges in applying these standards. Show, don't tell.

There are often gaps between policy and practice

- National and institutional regulations (policy/SOPs)

Vulnerability, methods procedures and contexts

Shy away from generalising and oversimplifying vulnerability
Distress protocol
Consider methodological variation

National and International 'codes'

It is part of the **4 Moral Principles** of Ethics

Autonomy	Beneficence	Non-maleficence	Justice
• Rights and dignity of research participants • Protect persons with diminished autonomy	• Positive contribution towards the welfare of people	• Not cause harm to the participants in particular or people in general	• Vulnerable subjects are not targeted for convenience

(Belmont Report, 1979)

Table 2: Belmont Report – Principles & Convictions and Action Guides

Fundamental Principle & Ethical Conviction	Action Guides
Respect for persons (dignity and autonomy) Researchers must treat participants as autonomous individuals and protect the rights of those with diminished autonomy.	Obtain prior voluntary informed consent. Protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants' personal information. Obtain proxy consent when a research participant lacks the legal or mental capacity to give informed consent. Make a support structure available when research is conducted with vulnerable participants.
Beneficence and non-maleficence Researchers must maximise the potential benefits of their research and reduce any possible risks or disadvantages to participants.	Conduct a risk-benefit analysis by weighing a study's potential benefits and risks and ensure that the benefits outweigh the risks. Provide participants and gatekeepers feedback on the findings to enhance a study's social value. Ensure the integrity of science by conducting rigorous, transparent and scientifically sound research that avoids bias and conflicts of interest.
Justice Researchers must ensure that the benefits and burdens of research are fairly distributed among different groups of participants, taking social justice issues into account.	Devise a sampling strategy with appropriate inclusion and exclusion criteria to avoid unjustified targeting or exclusion of specific groups in a study. Ensure that the potential risks of harm and benefits are fairly distributed across potential research populations.

(Amdur & Bankert, 2011)

Labuschagne & Visagie (In press) Compliance and Governance, Chapter 3.

Consider respect for persons/juristic persons

1) Is there a likelihood that the participants or the institution will be identified (consider the title, issues of confidentiality and privacy) and that it would increase the likelihood and/or impact of risk of harm?

An investigation into the approach by the current leadership of the detective service to improve performance of detectives: Pretoria Central police station

Job satisfaction and its impact on employee performance: The struggle to retain a talented workforce and advance service delivery in the Emergency Management services, Capricorn District Municipality

Is the topic sensitive? Is the study feasible?

RESPECT THE DIGNITY & ESSENTIAL WORTH OF ALL INDIVIDUALS.
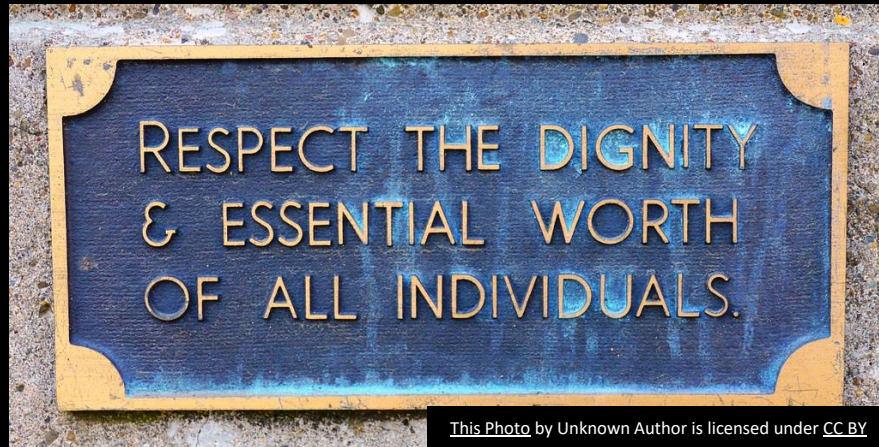
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Consider respect for persons/juristic persons

1) Are vulnerable groups targeted?
2) How will the researcher negotiate access and recruit the participants?
3) How will the researcher obtain prior, voluntary informed consent?
4) Does the IFC documentation adheres to the minimum information standards?
5) How will data records (written, audio or visual) be secured
6) How long will be retained?
7) Who will be responsible for storage and/or final disposal?
8) What type of personal information is required?
9) Will any special information be collected?
10) How will confidentiality and privacy be protected?
11) Special precautions for focus groups – where are they planned, potential breach of potential confidentiality (is this explained in the consent documents), non-disclosure of personal sensitive information advised

(Adapted from the DoH guidelines, 2015)

Assist the student to consider the risks of harm and the benefits of the study

Risk tool

1. Are the potential risks of harm reasonable and in relation to the anticipated benefits?

2. How can I assist the student to grow his/her competence in research ethics (literature/training)?

3. Could the research procedures increase risk of harm?

4. Review the data collection instruments (editorial issues; sensitivity of the questions)

Five Broad Categories for Assessing Risk of Harm

1. Assess whether a study meets the criteria of health research

2. Assess the potential vulnerability of the targeted group of participants

3. Assess the potential risk of harm related to proposed research procedures/activities

4. Assess the potential researcher-related risks of harm (including fieldworkers and members of the research team)

5. Assess the potential conflicts of interests – including inducements and/or incentives

STADIO

1. How does the proposed methods promote fair treatment and equitable participation (justice)?

2. Participant sampling (vulnerable participants not targeted for convenience; those that are likely to benefit are not systematically excluded)

3. Data collection and reporting

Principle	Description	Standard
Duty to society	Researchers and research must contribute to the common good and well-being of society (Weinbaum et al., 2019).	Relevance and social value Responsive to societal needs, knowledge, who benefits, post-study beneficiation & resource-sensitive Scientific validity Researcher competence and expertise
Social awareness	Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential influence of their research on society, marginal groups, and individuals.	Adequate and reflexive risk-benefit analysis Non-discrimination Non-stigmatisation
Respect for persons and communities	Researchers are obliged to uphold individual human dignity without compromising collective and communal dignity. Human dignity incorporates the obligation to treat individuals with *reverential respect* (Tangwa, 2000) solely by being human. Researchers express dignity by treating individuals as autonomous agents, protecting the rights of persons with diminished autonomy, and creating a harmonious balance between individual and collective autonomy in research involving communities, thus acting as culturally sensitive moral agents (Visagie et al., 2019). **Adapted from: SARIMA (2021) SADC Guide for Responsible and Ethical Research, Unpublished version**	Prior, free informed consent - Written consent - Verbal consent - E-consent Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality – increased need for data protection and security Protection of those with diminished autonomy Role player engagement Respect cultural diversity and pluralism

Principle	Description	Standard
Maximise research benefits	Researchers, Research Ethics Committees (RECs) and funders must protect the well-being of research participants, communities, animals, and the environment. The benefits of the research ought to outweigh the risks. To this end, research should be designed to maximise potential benefits, minimise potential risks, limit exploitation and stigmatisation of research participants or third parties, and promote social and scientific value of the research.	Independent ethical decision-making Favourable risk-benefit assessment
Equitable distribution of benefits and burdens (justice)	Researchers, RECs, funders and other stakeholders must ensure that the potential benefits and risks of research are equitably distributed amongst members of the society who are likely to benefit from it. Participants must be selected for scientific reasons and not their ease of accessibility.	Fair selection of participants - Rationale for selection of population - Scientifically sound - Inclusion criteria - Exclusion criteria
Fairness	Researchers, RECs and institutions must strive to improve the fairness, efficiency and impact of research collaborations to promote global health, equity and sustainable development.	In adherence to Sustainable Development Goal 17, fairness includes considerations concerning fair opportunity, process, benefit-sharing, costs, and research outcomes.

Standards guiding the review

Introduction to a Framework of Principles for Ethics Review

1. Social & Scientific Value
2. Scientific Validity
3. Fair Participant Selection
4. Researcher Competence

5. Informed Consent

6. Favourable Risk-Benefit Ratio
7. Independent Review
8. Privacy & Confidentiality

9. Vulnerability
10. Incentives & Costs

11. Stakeholder Responsibility & Role-player Engagement

Reviewing an ethics application

Checklist to ensure that all the reasonable guarantees and safeguards for the ethics of this study have been covered (adapted from Amdur, Kornetsky & Khan, 2011)	YES	NO	N/A
			(Place x in box)
a) Is the researcher(s) adequately qualified?			
b) Does he or she/they have a conflict of interest?			
c) Is there scientific justification for this research?			
d) Are the objectives likely to be achievable within a given time period?			
e) Is the scientific design adequate to answer the research question?			
f) Is the scientific design described and adequately justified?			
g) Are inclusion and exclusion criteria clearly specified and appropriate?			
h) If vulnerable groups are included, is this justified?			
i) Is the choice of participants appropriate for the questions being asked?			
j) Is participant selection equitable (distributive justice/fairness)?			

Reviewing an ethics application

k)   Are the methods for recruiting potential participants acceptable?

l)   Are the rationale and the proposed number of participants reasonable?

m)   Are the rationale and details of the research procedures accurately described and acceptable?

n)   Is the location where the procedures will be performed acceptable?

o)   Are the risks and benefits adequately identified, evaluated and described?

p)   Is the risk/benefit ratio acceptable for proceeding with the research?

q)   Is the amount or type of compensation or reimbursement reasonable?

r)   Have adequate provisions been made to protect the privacy and ensure the confidentiality of participants?

s)   Are all the elements of informed consent contained in the consent document?

t)   Is there a systematic well-explicated line of congruence and internal consistency?

What should be submitted as part of an ethics application

- Acceptance letter of proposal accepted by a HDC
- Approved proposal
- Gatekeeper permission letter (if appropriate)
- Data collection instruments
- Informed consent documentation/assent (on Unisa letterhead)
- Confidentiality agreements (if appropriate)
- Letters of language practitioner/translator (if appropriate)
- Declaration

Conclusion

- Taking your role as a RE guide serious as a supervisor
- Being competent in the application of the generally accepted principles and standards of research ethics
- Use your knowledge and understanding of RE throughout the different phases of the study
- Actively participate in the student's research ethics journey – facilitating 'research ethics imagination'
- Promote compliance with statutes and STADIO policies and practices

Research Ethics Forum 7

Nortjé · Visagie · Wessels Eds.

Nico Nortjé
Retha Visagie
JS Wessels *Editors*

Social Science Research Ethics in Africa

Social Science Research Ethics in Africa

Springer

Continued Professional Development

- Training – TRREE (First three modules)

https://elearning.trree.org/

◉ Macquarie University ethics training in Social Sciences and Humanities

http://mq.edu.au/ethics_training/index.php

This course specifically targets researchers who engage in social science research or RECs. It is generally global in outlook, but does focus on issues particular to Australia)

◉ Join the Community of Practice for Research Ethics and Integrity:

coetzt@unisa.ac.za

◉ Research Ethics Committee Association of Southern Africa (REASA)
Visit: www.reasa.africa

Continued Professional Development

* Visit the Global Health Network's e-Learning Centre for various courses in ethics, lab practice, community engagement, and many other health-related areas. https://globalhealthtrainingcentre.tghn.org/elearning/

* FHI360 Research Ethics Training Curriculum (RETC) 2nd Ed. (2009)

  http://www.fhi360.org/resource/research-ethics-training-curriculum-retc-second-edition

(This course is for researchers who research human subjects and those who carry out ethical reviews of research)

* Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

https://www.citiprogram.org/irbpage.asp?language=english

(This course is targeted towards researchers who research human subjects. It is especially useful for those who wish to apply for US funding and is sometimes a requirement in such cases)

Thank you

Enkosi

Re A Leboga

Dankie