Ethical Standards Within Organizational Behavior

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The results of a study of the ethics of publishing and reviewing research indicated (1) substantial disensus about whether standards exist; (2) vague or nonexistent mechanisms for communicating standards; and (3) few institutionalized penalties for violating ethical standards. Implications for organizational behavior as a developing profession are raised.

For an occupation to be considered a profession, it should have certain characteristics that socially define and control members' behavior (Filley, House, & Kerr, 1976; Kerr, Von Glinow, & Schriesheim, 1977). A profession is usually considered to possess: an abstract body of knowledge, existing codes of ethics, provision for formal training, and existence of formal societies with some power over entry into the occupation. In addition, professions typically contain an orientation toward service, a licensing of practitioners, and maintenance of education and performance quality standards (Freidson & Rhea, 1965; Kerr et al., 1977; Perrucci & Gerstl, 1969; Wilensky, 1964).

The review and evaluation of the work of peers is an important part of a professional within any profession. As Hiller and Dillingham (1979) noted, the nature of the academic scholar is that of critic, with intellectual exchange that may be unfriendly or impolite. Such intellectual interchange is an essential part of the accumulation of professional expertise and requires that ethical standards govern the exchange process. These ethical codes require a professional to apply "universalistic standards without being swayed by self interest and without becoming emotionally involved. Professionals also feel an obligation to society to maintain quality standards within the profession" (Filley et al., 1976, p. 382). As Kaplan noted, "Every discipline develops standards of professional competence to which

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its workers are subject [which are] . . . likely to be firm and unyielding” (1964, p. 4).

Publication frequently is viewed as an indicator of professional expertise (Kerr, Tolliver, & Petree, 1977), and career advancement of many academicians is contingent on acceptance of their research for publication. The peer reviewers of one's research within the publishing process are anonymous to the submitter, and this evaluation or gatekeeping system appears to work reasonably well for directing the research enterprise of most disciplines (Hiller & Dillingham, 1979). Editors and review boards (comprised of peer professionals), as well as colleagues within the professional association, exert pressure for conformity to professional standards and are responsible for gatekeeping decisions that govern the publishing process. They thereby influence career advancement within the profession. Yet, as important as such gatekeeping decisions are, virtually no research has examined whether an agreed-upon set of publishing ethics within organizational behavior (OB) exists that are consensually agreed upon, maintained, and sanctioned if violated. Because publication is such an obvious source of relatively objective data about performance, and because administrators in academic institutions frequently make decisions about retention, promotion, and tenure based largely on such data, the issue of agreed-upon standards by gatekeepers has serious implications for academic professionals, as well as for OB as a professional discipline. For this reason, this research will focus on ethics relevant to the review and publication of research as an important subset of the general problem of ethics in OB. Although this paper emphasizes the importance of ethics to OB as an emerging profession, it is clear that these issues are applicable equally to other academic disciplines.

This research attempted to deal with these questions as follows:

RQ1. Does an agreed-upon set of ethical standards exist within the field of Organizational Behavior? Specifically, do agreed-upon standards exist with respect to the following:

1. Multiple submissions: Is it ethical to submit an article to more than one journal at the same time? Is it ethical to submit an article simultaneously to a journal and a professional association?

2. Review issues: Are non-blind reviews—whereby the reviewer knows the identity of the author—ethical? Do they bias the review process? Is it ethical for an editor to accept or reject a paper without soliciting formal comments from the journal's review board? Is the use of only one reviewer ethical? What if the reviewer has previously rejected the same manuscript for another journal? Is it ethical to send a manuscript to a reviewer whose decision, given his or her general biases, is preordained?

3. EEO issues: Is it ethical for an editor to select an editorial review board member based on sex, race, or because of a specific geographical or institutional affiliation? What about selecting a review board member who lacks a track record in writing and research?
4. Authorship credit: How should names be ordered on a manuscript? If adding a prestigious name affects publication, is it ethical to add such a name? When is it appropriate to delete a coauthor’s name from a manuscript?

5. Editorial policies or professional association policies: Is it ethical to make an accept/reject decision contrary to reviewer recommendations? What about blanket rejections by the editor, without a second opinion, of manuscripts on passé topics?

*RQ2.* To the extent that agreement exists, how are ethical standards communicated?

*RQ3.* What penalties, if any, befall those who breach these standards?

**Method**

**Sample**

The sample consisted of 315 individuals who, because of their journal affiliations or professional association responsibilities, have an unusual capacity to shape the field of organizational behavior. A questionnaire was mailed to all editors, associate editors, and review board members as listed on the mastheads of the journals shown in Table 1. Questionnaires also were mailed to all Academy of Management division chairpersons.

**Table 1**

**Respondent Affiliations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Number of Respondents Stating Primary Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academy of Management Journal</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy of Management Review</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Science Quarterly</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Journal of Sociology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Sociological Review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Sociologist</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Science</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Management Review</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Business Review</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Relations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Applied Psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Business Research</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Management</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSU Business Topics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Behavior and Human Performance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Psychology</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Forces</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy of Management Executive Committee Members</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal affiliation not listed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aBecause many gatekeepers possessed dual affiliations, respondents were asked to list one affiliation as a primary referent in responding to the questions.*
and program chairpersons who were in office during the summer of 1979.
Usable questionnaires totaling 150 (approximately 48 percent of those
mailed) were returned from 27 editors and associate editors (n = 47, ap-
proximately 57 percent), 106 members of review boards (ERB) (n = 234, 
approximately 45 percent), and 17 program and division chairpersons 
(n = 34, 50 percent).

Survey

Survey items were designed specifically for this exploratory study after 
discussion between the authors and several gatekeepers. All respondents 
received identical surveys, except where tailoring was necessary to assure 
that the questions made sense (e.g., editors were not asked whether they 
would accept a manuscript for review when they know who the author is).
The survey consisted of 54 items; these appear in abbreviated form in 
Table 2. Respondents indicated whether each situation:

1 = presents no ethical/value problem whatsoever;
2 = might or might not be an ethical/value problem, depending on the 
individual case; or
3 = would very likely constitute an ethical impropriety.

Respondents were asked "for normative comments and prescriptive rec-
ommendations, not what you do on your journal. To the extent that your
responses need to be anchored, please use your journal as the focal
point."

Supplementary qualitative data were obtained in two ways: If respon-
dents chose response choice #2 for any of the items, they were asked to
elaborate on their answer. In addition, open-ended questions were in-
cluded in the survey. With respect to these, respondents were asked to
comment on their knowledge of "any systematic methods by which these
matters of ethics and standards are communicated to people in the field of
Organizational Behavior...." In addition, respondents were asked for
their comments on "how ethical violations are dealt with and standards con-
trolled...."

Finally, respondents were asked the following:
What issues involving values and ethics in Organizational Behavior
do you feel are important, but have been inadequately mentioned so
far?

Can you disclose one or more recent events that illustrate unethical
behavior on any of the topics above? Describe the incident as fully as
you can, but feel free to disguise names and institutions. In addition,
what sanctions were brought to bear, and what was the resolution of
the incident?

Method of Analysis

For the structured items, a frequency count was computed for each of
the subsamples in this study. A one-way ANOVA with Duncan's multiple
range test was computed to identify items with differences in responses among the editor, review board, and professional association subsamples. The commentary on response choice #2 ("might or might not be unethical") was content analyzed for common themes. The other open-ended questions also were content analyzed.

Results

With respect to whether agreed-upon ethical standards exist as regards publishing in OB, Table 2 reports the amount of agreement on each of the 54 items. The table shows results for the total sample, as well as any meaningful differences among subgroups.

Five general areas were addressed by the survey: (1) composition of review boards; (2) review board members agreeing to review manuscripts; (3) the review process; (4) editor/program chairperson's role in directing the field; and (5) submission and authorship credit.

Composition of Review Boards

With respect to composition of review boards, none of the respondents claimed that it would be unethical to appoint an assistant professor to a review board. Of those responding, 73 percent saw no impropriety in creating a geographically unbalanced board, and 71 percent felt that the absence of reviewers from government and industry is not an impropriety in selecting a review board. Strong agreement exists that it is ethical to select reviewers without consideration for race (74 percent) or sex (72 percent), and there is moderate agreement that taking race or sex into account when forming a review board constitutes an impropriety.

Academy of Management respondents were much more receptive than either editors or ERBs to the idea that race or sex could be taken into account in forming a review board (see Table 2). This probably reflects the representational nature of the Academy of Management. Nearly all editors and ERB members are appointed. On the other hand, Academy gatekeepers are nearly always elected and therefore probably are more receptive to the notion that political factors are important in the selection of gatekeepers.

The theme explicit in many of the comments accompanying response choice #2 ("might or might not be ethical") was that of reviewer competence. Such comments include:

- Competence is not necessarily distributed equally.
- Race may be important in reviewing articles that focus on racial issues.
- Another respondent suggested that:
  - Affirmative action is OK for inclusion but not for exclusion of groups of people.

Review Board Members Agreeing to Review Articles

There is strong agreement (75 percent) that it is unethical for a reviewer to take an editor or chairperson's particular biases into account when
### Table 2
Frequency of Responses Among Gatekeepers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>AEC</th>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>ERB</th>
<th>% Total for Response Choice</th>
<th>Meaningful Differences Across Subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Composition of review board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Selecting committee/review board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Without reputation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>41 36 23</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Without track record</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>36 34 30</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Involved with other committee/review board</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>68 21 11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assistant professor</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>89 11 0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Committee/review board competent, but:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Geographical overload</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>73 22 5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Institution or institution-type overload</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>42 31 27</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Take reviewer's race into account</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>18 32 50</td>
<td>-EEd 63 15 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fail to take reviewer's race into account</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>74 19 7</td>
<td>-ERB 48 32 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Take reviewer's sex into account</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>22 33 45</td>
<td>-EEd 41 35 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fail to take reviewer's sex into account</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>72 21 7</td>
<td>-ERB 41 35 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. No reviewer from government/industry</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td></td>
<td>71 18 11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Review board members agreeing to review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Selecting/agreeing to review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. With strong bias</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35 43 22</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Take editor/chairperson bias into account when reviewing</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>+ +</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>10 15 75</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Same institution as author</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>32 32 36</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Give to doctoral student</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>9 35 56</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Without Specialty in manuscript area</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>33 43 24</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Blanket rejection of passé topic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>18 18 64</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### III. Review process

#### D. Ethical for an editor to:

1. Use only one reviewer  
   -  +  +  -  34 29 38  
   -  +  +  +  48 26 26  

2. Use no one from committee/review board in review process  
   -  +  +  +  32 34 37  
   -  +  +  +  30 29 38  

3. Send manuscript to reviewer who has seen it and knows author  
   -  +  +  -  29 34 37  
   -  +  +  -  30 34 36  

4. Accept/reject without formal review  
   -  +  +  +  40 30 20  
   -  +  +  +  40 30 20  

5. Accept/reject contrary to reviews  
   -  +  +  x  28 23 49  
   -  +  +  -  29 23 49  

6. Accept/reject without specific comment to the author  
   -  +  x  x  18 29 53  
   -  +  x  x  20 29 53  

#### E. Division non-blind review ethical  
   -  +  x  x  29 42 29  

#### F. Ethical for reviewer to:

1. Accept for review knowing author  
   -  +  +  -  56 29 15  

2. Agree to review when reviewed and rejected for other journal/committee  
   -  +  +  -  38 25 37  

#### G. Executive committee put on program dominated by individual papers and symposia  
   -  +  x  x  41 38 21  

#### H. Noncompetitive selection for invited article/symposium  

1. Without reputation  
   -  +  x  x  66 26 8  

2. Without track record  
   -  +  x  x  43 29 43  

3. Individual asked previously  
   -  +  +  x  67 29 24  

4. To give young person break  
   -  +  +  x  67 29 24  

#### I. Editor/chairperson submits own manuscript for nonblind review  
   -  +  +  +  67 29 24  

### IV. Editor/program chairperson role in directing field

#### J. Encourage invited articles

1. Woman/minorities for sex/race, not competence  
   -  +  x  x  17 22 61  

2. Without concern for race/sex  
   -  +  +  x  76 10 15  

3. On topic editor wishes to encourage  
   -  +  +  +  74 24 2  

4. From same institution as editor  
   -  +  x  x  57 30 8  

5. From individual on review board committee  
   -  +  +  x  66 29 5  

6. Which have been rejected by blind review  
   -  +  x  x  15 27 58  

#### K. Reviewed and rejected, editor overrides to:

1. Encourage doctoral students  
   -  x  x  +  28 16 56  

2. Encourage individuals or geographical areas  
   -  x  x  +  19 17 64  

3. Feels strongly about manuscript  
   -  x  x  +  47 33 20  

---

*+ refers to 46-69 percent choosing the same response.  + + refers to ≥70 percent of the subsample choosing the same response choice.  - refers to ≤45 percent choosing the same response choice.  x indicates that this question was not asked of this subgroup.  

AECE refers to Academy Executive Committee members.  

Where subgroup differences exist, percentage totals choosing each response choice are reported for the differing groups.  Differing groups are bracketed, and are significant at the .05 level or better.
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>AEC%</th>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>ERB</th>
<th>Response Choice</th>
<th>% Total for</th>
<th>Meaningful Differences Across Subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L. You reject/other reviewer accepts—editor:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Accepts because favors topic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rejects because passé topic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Editor/chairperson directs field by:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Blanket rejection of passé topics</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Solicit manuscript for special issue on interesting new topics</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>91 7 2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Advise reviewer to reject particular methods</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Commission article by author and bypass review process</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Submission/authorship credit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Concerning order of names</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflects prestige/rank—not contribution</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>24 9 67</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alphabetical—not contribution</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>52 25 23</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Prestigious name who hasn’t contributed</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>6 7 87</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Name for data collection only</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49 27 24</td>
<td>Ed. 65  31  4 ERB 44 26 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Manuscript submissions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Multiple, same audience</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>11 12 77</td>
<td>Ed. 7  0 93 ERB 11 10 79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Journal and proceedings, same audience</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30 32 38</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Journals, different audiences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>21 22 57</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}+\) refers to 46-69 percent choosing the same response. \(^{+}+\) refers to ≥70 percent of the subsample choosing the same response choice. \(^{-}\) refers to ≤45 percent choosing the same response choice. \(^{x}\) indicates that this question was not asked of this subgroup.

\(^{b}\)AEC refers to Academy Executive Committee members.

\(^{c}\)Where subgroup differences exist, percentage totals choosing each response choice are reported for the differing groups. Differing groups are bracketed, and are significant at the .05 level or better.
agreeing to review a manuscript. There is moderate agreement (64 percent) among ERBs that it is ethically improper for them to engage in blanket rejections of manuscript on passé topics. A number of respondents commented on the difficulty of defining a passé topic. One respondent suggested that "problems are not passé; only the way they are handled."

Of the reviewers, 56 percent stated their belief that agreeing to review a manuscript, then passing it on to a doctoral student instead, is unethical. The most common dissenting opinion was that it is ethical "if the student happens to be an expert in the field. Not every Ph.D. candidate is a neophyte."

Review Process

This area produced the least consensus. Of the 15 items pertinent to this topic, none produced consensus by more than two-thirds of those responding. Many respondents described the review process as being inherently unfair, but their illustrations provided few commonalities. Incompetent reviewers, corrupt editors, and inadequate protection against good-for-nothing coauthors were among the many problems raised. Several respondents questioned the grounds under which an editor may single-handedly decide the fate of an article without its being subjected to any further review. The conditions most often cited as justification for this practice were: exceptionally high or low manuscript quality, and unusual shortage or surplus of available journal space. Those labeling this editorial practice unethical tended to point out that, among other things, the author was denied the protection of blind review.

All three subsamples differed in their attitude toward the use of no one from the review board in the review process. Editors felt most strongly that this presents no ethical problem (70 percent), whereas only 47 percent of the ERBs and 19 percent of the program chairpersons felt this way.

Editorial/Program Chair Role in Directing the Field

Items related to this area produced some consensus (45 percent-69 percent) among respondents. Reviewers tended to agree that it is unethical for an editor to override two reviewers who are in agreement if the editor's purpose is to encourage certain individuals or groups (e.g., doctoral students). There is some feeling that it is appropriate for an editor to override reviewers if the editor feels strongly about a manuscript. Comments suggested that a critical factor may be how emphatic the reviews are.

There is agreement among all groups that it is ethical for an editor or program chairperson to direct the field by soliciting manuscripts for special issues on new or interesting topics (91 percent), as well as inviting manuscript submissions on topics they wish to encourage (74 percent). Apropos to invited articles, there is some agreement (61 percent) that acceptance should be based on competence and not on minority status.
Furthermore, 45 percent of the gatekeepers felt that the review process should not be bypassed, with 58 percent suggesting that if an invited article is legitimately rejected via blind review, then it is unethical to publish it.

There is moderate agreement within the total sample that it is unethical for an editor to: promote blanket rejections of passé topics; advise reviewers to reject particular methodologies; and commission articles that bypass the review process.

Respondent comments go to the heart of the dilemma. One perspective emphasizes the editor’s responsibility in directing the field:

That’s the editor’s job!

Reviewers assist the editor.

The other perspective emphasizes the editor’s responsibility in reporting the reviewers’ decisions. An extreme advocate of this position labeled the editor as “a score keeper” (in the context of tabulating reviews). This view also is reflected in several respondent comments concerning invited articles (“They should undergo the normal review process”) and mixed reviews (“The editor should get a third review”).

Manuscript Submission and Authorship Credit

Questions in this area produced general agreement that the order of names on a manuscript should reflect contribution. There is strong consensus (86 percent) that addition of a prestigious name to the manuscript, without a corresponding contribution to the manuscript, is a breach of ethics. There also is some tendency (67 percent) to view the authorship order based on rank or prestige, rather than level of contribution, as unethical. Feelings about alphabetical ordering rather than level of contribution are somewhat mixed. A few comments suggested, perhaps cynically, that the first letter of one’s last name influences opinions on this issue. Several people stated that a footnote clarifying the order of names is a good solution to the problem.

Of the respondents, 49 percent stated that authorship inclusion of someone whose assistance was limited to data collection is not unethical. The nature of the data collection task, and its overall importance to the research, often was seen as critical. Editors view this practice as much less of a problem than do ERBs (see Table 2).

There is fairly strongly consensus (77 percent) that multiple submissions to journals or proceedings aimed at the same audience are unethical, although chairpersons differed from editors and reviewers in their situational contingencies. Comments indicated that timing, and informing the editor or program chairperson of the multiple submission, are crucial factors in submitting simultaneously to a journal and a proceeding, or to two journals. “If author acknowledges dual submission to editor” and “if in line with journal policy” underscore the opinion of some respondents that
the appropriateness of dual submission is a matter between the two publishing outlets and the author. Some respondents felt that two articles based on the same data set or similar ideas could be submitted simultaneously if the data or ideas were treated differently.

Differences Between Fields

Although the study was not designed for the purpose of identifying patterns of ethical norms among particular journals or types of reviewers, additional analyses were performed to investigate whether consistent patterns existed across fields, years in position, and journal affiliation. Only 8 significant differences were uncovered out of 105 differences tested, making it possible that these differences were due to chance. However, one difference emerged that pertained to differences between the fields of OB, psychology, management, and sociology and was thought provocative enough to warrant inclusion here.

Journal-affiliated respondents first were classified according to their reply to the “primary journal affiliation” item. Journals then were classified according to whether their primary emphasis was on psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, or management. Two significant differences (at the .05 level) were found, both of which pertain to the manuscript review process. Respondents associated with psychology journals ($\bar{X} = 1.43$) (and to a lesser extent, sociology journals, $\bar{X} = 1.87$) generally see no ethical impropriety in cases in which the editor requests a review from someone who has previously seen the manuscript and knows the author; on the other hand, respondents associated with OB and management journals tend to see this practice as unethical ($\bar{X} = 2.24$ and 2.26, respectively). Similarly, associates of sociology journals ($\bar{X} = 1.54$) (and to a lesser extent, psychology journals, $\bar{X} = 1.75$) tend to see no impropriety when an editor makes a binding decision without a formal review; associates of OB ($\bar{X} = 2.24$) and management journals ($\bar{X} = 2.30$) generally view this practice as unethical. These results suggest the possibility that ethical norms may in fact differ across fields.

Communication of Ethical Standards

Content analysis of the open-ended questions concerning the communication of ethical standards revealed that most respondents were informed about the standards for name sequencing solely through informal processes: by senior professors, mentors, or colleagues in informal discussion. A few respondents referred to American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, and two referenced an American Psychologist article. Only one respondent mentioned that the topic was covered in a formal class. It also was noted that several respondents claimed they didn’t know how standards were communicated; others claimed no knowledge that any standards existed.
Ethical standards pertaining to multiple submissions also were most likely to be learned through informal processes—most often through senior professors. However, almost as many respondents cited “journal policy,” and several cited APA or American Sociological Association (ASA) guidelines. A few respondents cited “word of mouth” or “editor reprimands.” “A formal class” was mentioned once, and one respondent suggested that the entire issue was “a matter of morals and common sense.”

Penalties for Ethical Violations

With respect to research question #3 (What are the penalties associated with breaches of ethics?), the vast majority of respondents from all three subgroups indicated that the mechanisms by which they heard of violations was by “accident,” “rumor,” or “grapevine,” and that few sanctions or penalties existed. Several respondents indicated that they were sensitized to violations by correspondence from editors or from reviewer comments. A few professional association respondents cited conversations at regional or national Academy of Management (AOM) meetings. There were isolated responses concerning formal procedures (e.g., written complaints, correspondence from review board, forwarding to editor of accusations), but these were a small percentage of the total comments received.

The most frequently cited response when a violation is discovered is to inform the appropriate editor or program chairperson. Several respondents reported one of the following alternatives when encountering a perceived ethical violation:

  Spread the word informally.
  Raise the issue at association meetings.
  Inform the editorial board.
  Inform the author (usually through the editor).

Automatic rejection.

Several respondents felt that they had no alternatives available for dealing with ethical violations. Several others indicated that as a last resort they would resign their gatekeeping position over an issue they felt strongly about.

In summary, results indicated a lack of agreement concerning the existence of standards surrounding publishing. No formal mechanisms exist for communicating standards or for dealing with violations of those standards.

Respondent Illustrations of Ethical Complaints and Violations

A universal problem with survey questionnaires is that respondents invariably discuss matters of importance to the researcher, which may or
may not be important to respondents. As a partial remedy to this problem in this research respondents were asked to suggest ethical issues of interest and importance to them. These responses were content analyzed. Respondents also were asked to illustrate unethical occurrences of which they were aware, disguising names and institutions.

Of the 150 respondents, 136 offered at least two sentences of illustrations. Responses fell into six broad categories. Three of these categories related to topics covered in the structured portion of the survey: review process inequities, multiple submissions, and doctoral student/coauthor abuses. In addition, respondents emphasized three additional areas: plagiarism, data abuses, and cronymism. These six categories are described below, along with representative respondent comments.

Unfair Reviews. Disclosure of ethical violations frequently dealt with review process inequities. These inequities were manifested in a tremendous variety of complaints. For example:

Several of our faculty in management had articles out 12-18 months before hearing a decision. This is inexcusable!

(reviewers who) . . . write one-sentence reviews which evidences that they have not read the manuscript. If I were an editor and this happened a couple of times, I would be reluctant to send that reviewer further manuscripts.

. . . after a six month wait, I received a cursory couple of lines rejection of a paper from the editor—based on inappropriate content!—of a prestige journal. Thinking no reviewer had seen the paper, I protested to the editor; in an off-hand manner he offered to look at the paper again. I found this response infuriating given the earlier time it had taken to get my response. I circulated the correspondence to editorial review board members, receiving five or six sympathetic responses.

I think it is unethical for an editor to reject a revised paper which has met or satisfied the reservations of earlier reviewers but is then nixed by a new reviewer. This happened to me at . . . . I submitted a paper. After five months, I got a review—from one reviewer. The reviewer’s comments could be addressed by revision. The revised paper was resubmitted. After four more months, two reviews came back. One from the original reviewer said “warrants serious consideration for publication.” The other reviewer . . . didn’t like it. The editor went with the latter’s vote. So I lost nine months.

One respondent criticized:

Reviewers—biases on methodology and failure to give expeditious attention to manuscripts submitted
Editors—selection of review board members for particular manuscripts depending upon whether the editor wants the manuscript accepted or rejected.

Multiple Submissions. Despite the fact that multiple submissions were dealt with directly in the structured portion of the questionnaire, many respondents chose to add detailed comments. The following are representative:

As editor of . . . , I can say the most frequent ethical violation I encounter is multiple submission—through informal communication network with other editors, and reviewers, we have “caught” several of these. In most instances, the author is notified that we consider this an ethical breach, and therefore reject. That is about the extent of the sanction applied.

I was reviewing a paper for . . . when the identical manuscript was published in . . . . Fortunately, the [journal for which I was reviewing] hadn’t quite finished, so I told the section editor and he dealt with it via a rejection and nasty letter.

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submitted a paper to two divisions simultaneously, was accepted at both, then withdrew from one. The division chair roasted him in a letter, and he apologized. When serving as a [reviewer for AIDS], I got a paper from a person who had submitted the same paper at the same time to the Academy. I knew about the Academy submission because I was reviewing some papers for a program chairperson in one of the divisions and had reviewed it there. The papers were identical except for different titles. We rejected both papers and told him why! I also told __________, who was the overall chairperson so that he could do whatever! I don't know what, if anything he ever did about it.

Abuses of Doctoral Students, Clients, Coauthors, and Subjects. A third area systematically mentioned was how skilled many have become at allegedly abusing research participants and subjects. Three examples are:

A professor required all graduate students to sign a release form turning over to him, for his exclusive use, any and all work done in his course. He routinely got one or two papers at regional meetings from this. ([He] just changed the title page in several cases!)

A PI put his/her name on an article from a government-supported research effort which he/she had had no direct involvement in. The graduate students who actually did the research let it pass, in part because the PI was also their academic advisor and they thought the potential cost of confrontation was too great. Unsatisfactory resolution.

College professors assigning to students:
1. literature review
2. data collection
3. data analysis
4. subjects
without giving them credit for those efforts. Under any circumstances, I think students who pay for their education ought to be provided that, without them being expected to provide publication help to professors.

Several respondents noted that it is highly unethical for a “Ph.D. dissertation to appear with the major professor as the senior author.” One commented that “forcing grad students to coauthor a dissertation” was an unethical practice. Others cited the abuse of clients as unethical. One respondent noted:

An acquaintance writes cases, disguising them by himself and never getting a release from the organization. I've admonished him, and tell colleagues of it.

One exclaimed:
Ye gods! What about the ethics of teaching bankrupt theory that the managers find "grabby" because it seems to promise THE ANSWER?

Relative to abusing research subjects, one respondent claimed:
...there is just a lot of lying to subjects as a means of manipulating independent variables and I think it is a poor habit.

Another noted:
In empirical research, respect of privacy and human dignity are crucial—the “publish or perish” drive has great dangers—whether the work is being carried out in labs, or in the real world.

Lastly, with respect to abuse of coauthors, one respondent captured the flavor by stating:
I end up feeling I've been treated unethically when coauthors promise their participation and then manage to schedule in other things of higher priority—when they don't deliver what they've promised, but leave the work to me... I'm getting lots more assertive about that lately simply saying if you want your name on it, you've got to deliver.

Plagiarism. By far the most common disclosure of ethical violations centered on plagiarizing someone else's work. Respondents candidly
pointed out that prestigious people, doctoral students, and friends plagiarize. In addition, several noted that reviewers sometimes plagiarize by stealing an author’s ideas after rejecting his/her manuscript. There were far too many illustrations to include all; however the following are representative:

In 1975, a colleague saw a term paper he wrote as a grad student, published in a journal under the authorship of another former grad student (in the same seminar), now a faculty member at another institution. The journal made a note in the next issue about this, but the guilty grad student (plagiarist) didn’t suffer any consequences.

Another noted that he uncovered a case of plagiarism and complained to the author’s employing university. The university claimed that “censure is the responsibility of the professional organization publishing the paper.”

Another respondent claimed:

I know of three separate authors who paraphrased (virtually quoted) the work and ideas of other authors. Nothing happened—the people were well known—only a slight tarnish to the reputations of the plagiarizing authors.

One editor indicated in his response:

(1) authors submitted a paper much of which had been published word-for-word elsewhere
(2) called the authors and told them all future papers would be rejected unless completely new article submitted
(3) authors did more work, wrote new article on same, and promised to “watch it” in future
(4) I told them that I, as editor, would, from now on take considerable interest in all their publications.

One respondent disclosed the following:

I refereed a paper which had 3+ pages which sounded familiar. Dug out my copy of my doctoral thesis and compared—sure enough, the 3+ pages had been lifted essentially whole out of the middle of my thesis (available on University microfilm). I copied my own work, sent it to the editor with the manuscript and told the editor that I recommended rejection (my thesis wasn’t even cited!) and that I did not want to know the authors’ names. The paper was rejected by the editor with an explanation that it appeared that the paper had been copied from existing work—copy of my work enclosed. That’s the last I heard of it.

Another mentioned:

...the plagiarism incident, after being verified led to the following action:
(1) The original, real author was recognized as one of the authors by the journal
(2) The editors of the journal devoted a page to describing the incident and said members of the field should “watch it”
(3) The guilty party was supported by his department and eventually was promoted and given tenure

Relative to stealing ideas, one respondent commented:

...a reviewer takes ideas from a manuscript he/she has rejected and incorporates them into one of his/her publications which appears before rejected piece can be revised.

Another noted:

The theft of ideas is unethical, where a reviewer rejects manuscript, then writes his own manuscript on the subject, getting his work published while blocking the other author who really had the idea first.

Data Abuses. Ethical complaints centered on fudging data, forcing data to fit pet theories, and “milking” data into several pieces. For example, one respondent noted:
An author submitted a paper to a well-known refereed journal. It had previously been reviewed as a potential Academy paper. The editor, coincidentally, sent it to the same person who had reviewed it for the Academy. Using the same data base, the author had different results and conclusions than in the earlier paper. The editor rejected the paper with a strong critical cautionary letter.

Another respondent commented:

The [unethical behaviors] that really get around are the cases where data are fudged or fictitious. Those names stay with us for a very long time.

One raised a question:

...the ethical conduct of the authors is the biggest problem: did they work toward an honest answer to their question, or are they forcing their data into their theories? This is the real problem a reviewer faces....

Another mentioned:

...no control over data reporting; obscure and deliberately incomplete reporting of results; misuses of statistics; lack of openness with respect to results (i.e., only success stories (***) are published; and trivial subjects analyzed with great sophistication.

Someone else cited:

the failure to preserve original data on which a paper is based.

Another noted that:

A graduate student uncovered two articles (with radically different titles) in two copyrighted journals published within six months of one another by the same author which contained huge VERBATIM selections from one another with no "cross-referencing.” The positions were different (mostly the first and last paragraphs), we think, obviously to pass a casual inspection. Copies of both with identical portions marked were sent to the publishers of both journals. One journal was never heard from, the other thanked us and said that while deplorable, this sometimes occurs.

Finally, one irate respondent described:

Repeated analysis and presentation of the same data, without making this explicitly known in the article.

Cronyism. Showing favoritism to one’s friends was declared by most respondents to be both unethical and common. The following depicts the general tone respondents felt.

In some lesser, university-based journals, I get the impression that not-very-good “home” stuff gets by when it shouldn't.

One respondent went even further:

The editor and, to some extent, the associate editor of _________ run the journal as a private playground, accepting/rejecting without formal review, stuffing same school/board members/friends’ articles in, etc., more or less regularly. No resolution.

One noted:

_______ loaded up the _______ Board with cronies, women of no reputation, friends, and well-wishers for personal and political reasons. It was obvious to many, but so far as I know, nothing was/could be done.

One Academy member noted that he considered it unethical to have:

Organized voting for officers (on one occasion organized by the person being voted on).

Cronyism also is manifested when an editor succumbs to pressure by others:

I know of prestigious individuals who call editors to exert personal pressure to accept articles.

One respondent noted:

In general, “blind” reviews are not blind. The editor knows author identity, affiliation and “track record” and sends out for review on that basis, so that prestigious people in good schools who use conventional methodologies/perspectives get “nice” reviewers
while the opposite get bored, ideological reviewers. ... in sociology, papers with fancy numbers get favorable treatment. I've seen editors write letters saying there's no audience for this piece (even though reviewers recommended acceptance), and in each case the article was qualitative and used a certain theoretical perspective. Horrible excuse and blanket ideological bias.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Survey results indicate that only with respect to the composition of review boards was there reasonably strong consensus; gatekeepers were in strong agreement on half of the items. The other four general areas were characterized by considerable dissensus.

The authors considered a number of possible explanations for this finding. For example, it is possible that respondents may have interpreted questions differently; however, the written comments suggest that this was not an important contributor to dissensus. It also is possible that differences may reflect differences in journal policies; however, many of the issues raised have never been addressed in statements of journal policy. It also is possible that poor agreement resulted from the respondents' feeling that the area of inquiry was trivial and the questions unimportant. However, a tremendous amount of time was spent by most respondents in writing lengthy commentary and qualifiers to the questions, many of the open-ended comments mirrored the "structured" topics covered, and obvious emotion and frustration were revealed in many of the written explanations. All these suggest that the areas of inquiry are extremely important to most respondents. In all, 136 of the 150 respondents wrote at least several sentences in addition to checking the requisite boxes. Over 25 percent of these wrote more than one additional page of commentary.

The design of this study makes it impossible to say anything about the frequency of the acts cited as unethical—although in a few cases, as previously indicated, several respondents described a particular practice as common. Because respondents were asked specifically for unethical incidents, their responses suggest a negative tone about publishing practices in OB, perhaps skewing the data in that direction. Further research is needed to determine the prevalence and frequency of these perceptions of unethical practice within the field of OB.

This study also cannot exclude the possibility that consensus does exist with respect to issues not investigated within this research. This possibility is, in fact, strongly suggested by many of the open-ended comments that universally condemn fudging data, plagiarism, and cronyism. Nevertheless, responses to the research instrument convincingly demonstrated that the topics raised in this research were seen as pertinent and meaningful by most respondents. For the most part, respondents did not agree on what constitutes ethical violations.
Recommendations for the Profession

Professions such as law and medicine possess codes of ethics that are maintained, and transgressions sanctioned, through peer control and collegial maintenance of standards. It may sometimes seem to laymen with respect to these professions that violations of standards are ignored more often than they are sanctioned. Nonetheless, formal channels for protest at least exist and occasionally are used to deal with these violations.

Barber (1963), Danielson (1960), Freidson (1970, 1975), Hall (1968), Perrucci (1971), Snizek (1972), and others have underscored the importance of codes of ethics, and formal and informal communication of these ethics, as essential components of any profession. Similarly, it has been pointed out that fields or disciplines with the least paradigmatic development show little consensual agreement on important issues to be researched or methodologies to be employed (Lodahl & Gordon, 1972; Pfef fer, 1977). Data from the research described in this study suggest strongly that, in its current state, OB possesses no code of ethics, no basis for consistent peer control, and no structures that currently serve to maintain professional standards. Few standards of behavior are even widely agreed upon. Given this condition, the feelings of uncertainty and awkwardness described by many respondents as accompanying their efforts to maintain collegial control are hardly surprising. Most professions have formal channels within their associations that act to minimize discomfort when members bring charges against, or otherwise criticize, fellow members. These committees permit criticisms to be administered anonymously, at arm's length, and in a known, systematic manner (Freidson, 1975). In the field of OB, no such formal channels exist.

It therefore seems safe to conclude that the OB discipline is still in a pre-professionalized stage. If it can be assumed that it would be desirable for the discipline to move toward greater professionalization, consideration should be given to how this might be accomplished. The following ideas are proposed for consideration:

1. The Academy of Management, which is the principal association of academic OB professionals, could establish an ethics committee to handle ethical improprieties such as those described in this study. Toward that end, a task force should be constituted to draft documents and establish the necessary structural apparatus to handle ethical complaints.

2. Some of the most prestigious journals regularly hold annual meetings, at which editors and review board members typically discuss such things as review times and acceptance rates. These same meetings also could include some circulation of norms, values, and ethics in the field of OB.

3. Journal editors often deliver annual messages to their readers, informing them about forthcoming issues, board member changes, and preferences for manuscript format. Such messages could be made to include various explications of norms and standards.
4. National and regional professional associations, which meet annually for a variety of reasons, could allocate some small portion of their program time toward a forum for discussion of these issues.

5. Professional associations, as well as journal editors, could ensure that feedback is given to complainants about the resolution of any alleged ethical violation reported.

6. The objective of these and other changes should be to permit private views on ethical issues to be dealt with in a public forum, so as to permit OB to derive universalistic rather than particularistic ethical standards, mechanisms to communicate these standards, and systems for dealing with violations when they occur.

Recommendations for the Academic Professional

So long as the state of affairs described by respondents in this research continues to exist, the following summary, drawn from the current data, may serve as a (necessarily incomplete) list of inappropriate behaviors. Some of these may seem so self-evident as to be unworthy of mention; however, all were mentioned by at least a few respondents as being, in their opinion, relatively common practices.

It is considered inappropriate to:

1. Make trivial, cosmetic changes to a manuscript for the purpose of marketing it as a "different" manuscript.

2. "Milk" data, for example, by disassembling data that belong together so as to increase one's number of publications.

3. Assign authorship based on prestige or presumed ability to influence chances for publication.

4. Use portions of someone else's work without giving appropriate credit.

5. Except under special circumstances, to submit substantially identical manuscripts to two journals simultaneously.

6. Employ students (or others) to do literature review, data collection, and so on, without giving appropriate credit.

7. Alter data so as to fit one's theory or to increase statistical significance.

8. Agree to review a manuscript, and then distribute the manuscript to a graduate student.

The data also suggest that the absence of established communication mechanisms is an important contributor to the failure at times to live up to each other's expectations and ethical sensibilities. A number of respondents offered recommendations for improving communications among coauthors, or between authors and gatekeepers. Among these recommendations are the following:

1. Authors who receive an apparently incomplete or unfair review of their manuscript should consider contacting the editor for another
review. Editors in this survey claimed to be far more amenable toward receiving such requests than is generally believed.

2. Authors should consider establishment of a relatively formal work "contract" at the start of a joint venture.

3. Should ambiguity continue to exist about the relative contribution of collaborators, authors should communicate, via a footnote, how the order of authorship was derived.

4. In cases of multiple submission of a manuscript to two journals, or to a journal and a conference Proceedings, the relevant editors and/or chairpersons should be informed of the dual submission, the circumstances explained, and permission sought.

References


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