

Ethical Decision Making in a Mixed Methodological Study Investigating Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress amongst Academics.

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Abstract: *Whereas there appears to be a large body of literature that focuses on ethical concerns within the context of research, there continues to be a feeling of isolation and lack of awareness of ethical guidance and support that leaves researchers to rely on institutional ethical requirements as well as their own ethical principles and previous experience. Consequently, there can be a significant variance in the quality of research. The challenge is that ethical decision making is not a term that can be simply defined, as it appears to include multiple influences such as individual difference, that include personality and environmental factors. As there appears to be no universal consensus, and the definition of ethics is broad, it gives rise to difficulties in defining the term "ethics". However, it is important that stakeholder rights and dignity are protected. Hence, ethics is an essential component that needs to be addressed when undertaking academic research. The aim of this paper is to discuss the ethical implications associated with the study that investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress amongst 533 academics, helping to add a little more to existing information.*

Keywords— ethics, ethical principles, mixed methodology, reactive methodology, thematic analysis, deontological approach, emotional intelligence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional view of the workplace is that emotions are irrelevant and are the antithesis of rational thinking. However, as pointed out by Ashforth & Humphrey, (1995), the workplace is saturated by emotions. Furthermore, there is an increase in those working in the service sector and they have to be more emotionally engaged with the customer that, in turn, gives rise to increased interest around psychology, emotions and, emotional intelligence within the workplace (Briner, 1999).

There have been dramatic changes in the way people work increasing feelings of perceived stress. The modern workplace means that not only do workers have computers on their desk, they now have personal devices that enable work to be undertaken beyond the traditional confines of the office. There is increased pressure from globalization; competition from organisations in other countries that just a few decades ago didn't seem to be possible. The advent of the computer age increases speed and means to communicate adding to the feeling that the world is getting smaller. Subject to access to the internet, there is greater ease to interact between people. Artificial intelligence is beginning to remove the need to employ people. It builds on feelings of uncertainty and insecurity adding to pressure and stress.

The advantage of the development of hard and soft computer technology allows workers to be more flexible where they can work away from their desk and to work outside the traditional 9.00 to 5.00 working day. However,

this can lead to home/ work conflict where the line between work and homelife are increasingly blurred adding to feelings of stress. (Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuarachchi & Boyd, 2003). Furthermore, there appears to be increasing demands where academics work longer hours and experience heavy and unmanageable workloads that may give rise to increased levels of stress that can impact upon well-being and job performance (for example: Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, & Blix, 1994; Bowen, 2019; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2017; 2018; Cross & Carroll, 1990; Daniels & Guppy, 1994; Doyle & Hind, 1998; Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Kinman, 1998; Kinman, 2014; Sliskovic & Sersic, 2011).

This study uses a systematic and sequential approach to help answer questions (Creswell, 1995, 1999, 2013; Flick, 2011). It is undertaken over two phases to find out if there is a correlation between emotional intelligence and well-being. The first phase is associated with an on-line questionnaire (quantitative). The second phase includes a set of interviews (qualitative) that brings together information that helps provide greater understanding and insight of the research topic that may have not been possible if each approach had been used separately. The findings of the study suggest that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with lower levels of perceived stress and vice versa (Bowen 2019; Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2018).

This study also uses a deontological ethical approach that acknowledges that the ends that are served by the research do not justify the use of research that is unethical. It

regards certain acts as right or wrong in and of themselves (Bryman, 2012). This underlies Kant philosophy not to lie, cheat or coerce (Kane, 2010). It is important to keep promises.

There appears to be a large body of literature that focuses on ethical concerns within the context of research (Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor & Graham, 2012). However there continues to be a feeling of isolation and lack of awareness of ethical guidance and support leaving researchers to rely on institutional ethical requirements together with their own ethical principles and previous experience (Powell, Graham, Taylor, Newell & Fitzgerald, 2011). Graham (2015) points out that, consequently, there can be a significant variance in the quality of research. It is, therefore, helpful to make use of ethical codes of practice to safeguard and protect stakeholders when undertaking social research studies. This study incorporates the use of the university's own ethical codes of practice and guidelines, together with that provided by the British Psychological Society (BPS).

This academic paper, therefore, builds upon the findings from earlier academic study (For example: Bowen, 2019; Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2018) and reflects on the ethical issues and challenges associated with social research. It adds a little more information to help build on existing sources explaining the challenges of addressing ethical issues associated with a mixed methodological study of 533 academics; those employed by a university full time, part time and hourly paid and; who may be lecturers, tutors, instructors and/ or researchers.

2. BACKGROUND

Rubin & Riggio (2005) points out that decision making is often focused on cognitive factors ignoring the importance of emotions and how they can affect ethical decision making. There may be other factors that influence decision making. This includes making ethical and moral decisions. Whereas those who reach a higher level of moral reasoning are more likely to exhibit greater consistency with higher levels of moral action, ethical decision making depends upon personality differences that include: ego strength, field dependence and locus of control (Trevino, 1986). Ego strength is the ability to resist external impulses and pressures. Field independence is the ability to rely less on others when trying to understand unclear or challenging experiences. Locus of control is the ability to take personal responsibility for decision making and to be able to rely on their own ethical principles. Bommer, Gratto, Gravander & Tuttle (1987) add to the discussion explaining that other factors may also be influential in ethical decision making, that include self-concept, life experiences, together with wider personality differences that include emotions. Each person has their own views, thoughts and understanding of the world around them. Furthermore, individual values attitudes and

beliefs can affect ethical decision making (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). For example, Rubin & Riggio (2005) propose that those who are more educated, older and, more emotionally mature, are likely to engage in higher ethical and moral behaviour.

Anderson (2009) advises that the term “*moral*” is associated with actions that are related to ideas of that which is right or wrong and “*ethics*” linked to what should or should not be done. Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin (2010) suggests that “*moral standards*” refer to beliefs that may or may not be unethical while “*ethical dilemma*” refers to the situation in which decisions are made that incorporate ethical implications. Ethics is more likely to be associated with that which conforms to culturally or socially acceptable norms. The terms “*morals*” and “*ethics*” often appear to be interchangeable (Anderson, 2009). For example, The BPS (2014:5) define research ethics as “*moral principles guiding research from its inception through to completion and publication of results*”. Wellington (2015) suggests that ethics is a set of moral principles and guiding conduct which are held by a group or profession. Ethics is similar to moral philosophy (what is right and what is wrong) (Jones, 2003). Cooper & Schindler (2008) define ethics as the standards or norms of behaviour that help guide moral choices about the researchers behaviour and the relationship with others. Trevino & Nelson (2010) describe ethics as incorporating standards of conduct, principles and norms that govern an individual or group. The challenge that researchers have is that ethical decision making is not a term that can be simply defined, as it appears to include multiple influences such as individual difference, that include personality and environmental factors, that can affect ethical/ unethical behavior (Trevino, 1986). There appears to be a lack of agreement as to a single agreed definition of ethical judgement within business ethics literature (Sparks & Pan, 2010). This is supported by Onyebuchi (2011) who advises that there is no universal consensus, and the definition of ethics is broad. As pointed out by Somerville (2004) those looking for a definition of ethics may find the search long and hard. It, therefore, gives rise to difficulties in defining the term “*ethics*”.

When undertaking social research, it is important to protect stakeholders as the data could be used for nefarious reasons placing the participant at possible risk or harm. Willig (2008) recommends that those undertaking academic research should protect participants from harm and loss, while preserving their psychological well-being and dignity at all times. What is clear is that ethical issues should be addressed ensuring that the research is “*methodologically sound and morally defensible to all those who are involved*” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009:184). The reasoning behind this is that ethical issues remain throughout the research process, commencing with the drafting of the research question through to the dissemination of the findings of the research. What is important is doing what is

right and ensuring that outcomes are seen to be good (Anderson, 2009). It is, therefore, helpful to apply ethical principles and codes of practice that provide guidelines to protect stakeholders from potential harm.

3. METHODOLOGY

Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) suggest that there are three approaches to mixed methodology. These are concurrent, conversion and, sequential. This study uses mixed methodology that incorporates a sequential approach, where the quantitative first phase is followed by qualitative analysis second phase (Creswell, Plano-Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003). An advantage of using mixed methodology is that it can help offset using a single approach (Caruth, 2013).

This study also makes use of internet mediated research (IMR) that is defined as “*any research involving the remote acquisition of data from or about human participants using the internet and its associated technologies*” (BPS, 2017b:3). The BPS (2017b) identify two approaches of IMR: reactive and non-reactive methodologies. Reactive methodology is where participants interact with materials on line (questionnaires and interviews). Non-reactive methodology is where data is collected without necessarily having direct interaction with participants and includes observations and data mining. Of the two IMR approaches (reactive and non-reactive methodologies) identified by the BPS, reactive methodology is applied in this study as it makes use of findings from questionnaire/ survey and interview data (Bowen, 2019; Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2018).

The first phase is associated with the questionnaire/ survey that includes open questions allowing participants to express their own thoughts and views. Approximately, 3,900 academics are directed, via LinkedIn (social media), to the online questionnaire/ survey. The advantage of using social media is that it allows for a greater number, and more diverse type, of people to participate. The advantage of using LinkedIn is that it allows connection to those in academia that may not otherwise be as successful. It helps increase the number of participants. 543 academics respond of which 10 advised that they are either students or held administrative roles. Whereas it is appreciated that they participated, to avoid possible misinterpretation of data and confusion, the 10 non-academics are removed from the sample. Therefore, the total number that are included in this study is 533 (100%) of which 244 (45.8%) are male and 289 (54.2%) are female. Analysis is undertaken using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and internal checks undertaken.

The second phase includes semi structured interviews, that uncover the story behind the participants experience (Doody & Noonan, 2012). They help contextualize the findings from the questionnaire/ survey undertaken in the first phase, enriching the findings and generating new knowledge (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Creswell, Plano-Clark,

Gutmann & Hanson, 2003; Mason, 2006; Stange, 2006; Taylor & Trumbull, 2005). Furthermore, undertaking semi structured interviews can allow for follow up questions to be asked that can enhance findings, leading to unexpected results that may not be forthcoming from undertaking a questionnaire/ survey alone (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page, 2011). 11 academics are interviewed ranging from the age of 29 to 58. However, two people did not wish to provide their age. Of the sample, 5 are male and 6 are female. The average length of the interviews is 43 minutes; the shortest being 23.06 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 11 minutes. To help analyze the findings from the interview data, Nvivo is used, from which themes emerge. The advantage of using Nvivo is that it allows for the speeding up of the analysis while helping to avoid information overload (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2005).

Thematic analysis is undertaken that helps provide greater depth and understanding of the academic’s perspective. Whereas there does not appear to be a consensual agreement as to the meaning of the term “*thematic analysis*”, Braun & Clarke (2008) suggest that it can be used with many, if not all qualitative methodologies. It allows for themes, patterns and ideas to emerge that can then be interpreted, going beyond the surface level (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2008; Stone, 1997).

Findings from this study suggest that there is an invert relationship between perceived stress and managing emotions (Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016). Bowen, Rose & Pilkington (2018) also identify that the most important factors that influence how academics cope with interpersonal relationships within higher education (universities) include context, trust and empathy.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on the ethical issues associated with the study, building upon the earlier academic papers that have reflected on the findings from the questionnaire/ survey and interview data (Bowen, 2019; Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2017; 2018).

To help avoid possible inappropriate behavior or circumstances that may lead to legal action, it is recommended that ethical processes and procedures should always be followed. This includes a request for approval through the university’s ethics committee. Ethics committees and ethical guidelines are there to protect stakeholders that include participants and institutions. They help protect the researcher’s, participant’s and institution’s reputation (Bryman, 2012). Where social research is undertaken, that involves people, it is usual that universities require ethical approval that may include: an ethics application form, detailed research proposal that includes the methodology being adopted and, an ethics review check list (Wilson, 2014). A participation consent form should also be submitted, or clear explanation provided in the application as to how

participant consent is to be obtained. Therefore, as part of this study, a written ethics application and proposal are made via the university's own processes and procedures in which approval is sought. This is reviewed and agreed by a committee of a select members of academic staff, skilled and experienced in assessing such applications, before the commencement of the study.

If research is being undertaken independently it is still important to follow ethical codes of conduct and guidance. This may be forthcoming from relevant and appropriate professional organizations (For example: BPS). To reinforce the importance of meeting with ethical standards, this study also uses advice and guidance provided by the BPS that refers to "*Code of human research ethics*" (BPS, 2014), "*Practice guidelines*" (BPS, 2017a), "*Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research*" (BPS, 2017b) and "*Code of ethics and conduct*" (BPS, 2018). This study is undertaken prior to the publication of the more recent version of the BPS advice and guidance on ethics and IMR (for example: BPS, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). However, similar principles and guidelines are followed as provided in earlier documentation (for example: BPS, 2013).

4.1 Ethical principles

The BPS (2018) identifies four major ethical principles that build upon the above statements: 1) respect, 2) competency, 3) integrity and, 4) responsibility that are reflected upon below in more detail and embedded into the study.

Respect: The "*Golden rule*", refers to "*ethics of reciprocity*", that is incorporated into many religious texts (Blackburn, 2003). However, the golden rule goes well beyond religious sources. It should be incorporated into all aspects of life. One of the foundation blocks in the "*Golden Rule*" is the term "*respect*". It is how we treat ourselves and how we treat others. The term dates to the time of Confucius (500BC) who explains it as "*treating others as you would like others to treat you.*" Aristotle (385BC) provides a similar view, that we should "*conduct ourselves towards others as we would have them act towards us*". Thales (464BC) advises to "*avoid doing what you would blame others for,*" while Hillel (50BC) states "*not to do to others what you would not like others to do to you*" (Graves, 1875).

Respect means that feelings and rights of those participating in the research should be protected (Wilson, 2014). It also includes not being discourteous or rude (Scanio 2005). The BPS (2014:8) goes on to state that there should be respect for "*individual, cultural, and role differences including those involving age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity, race (including color, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, education, language, and socio-economic status*". Respect is valuing one's own dignity and that in others. Dignity requires

social recognition of intrinsic values that can provide equal opportunities to all (Lagon & Arend, 2014). This is underpinned by the Equalities Act (2010) that states that it unlawful to directly or indirectly discriminate against someone on grounds of characteristics including: age, disability, marriage/ civil partnership, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex/ gender, pregnancy and maternity.

This study acknowledges the importance of adhering to BPS's (2014; 2018) ethic principles of ensuring that respect and dignity of all participants and stakeholders are upheld.

Competency: Pope & Vasquez (2007) regard competency as a cornerstone of ethical practice and that it is important to recognize and value the high standard of professional work and competency required when undertaking academic research. Researchers need to develop their own skills that incorporate ethical assessment, reflection and evaluation (Hogan, 2013). It is, therefore, acknowledged that there is need to develop and optimize skills and knowledge to meet with the requisite competency when undertaking this study. To achieve this, research is undertaken including reading of journal articles and text books, throughout this study. Furthermore, regular workshops and seminars are attended on areas such as equalities, ethics, academic research writing, methodology, SPSS and NVivo that help inform and build on existing knowledge that are subsequently applied to the study.

Integrity: The Economic & Social Research Council, ESRC, (2019) identifies integrity and transparency as core to undertaking research. Integrity is consistently valuing clarity, fairness, accuracy and honesty. It refers to maintaining professional and personal boundaries while addressing circumstances in which misconduct may occur (BPS, 2018). Every effort is made to ensure that the integrity of this study meets with the BPS (2018) advice. The relationship between the researchers and participants is friendly, while professional distance is maintained.

This study is partly reliant on findings from interview transcripts that are used to help explain and clarify findings from the questionnaire/ survey. They provide supporting information to that helps give insight into how and what participants think and feel. The findings rely on the honesty of the researcher to interpreted and explain content and context and this is acknowledged as a limitation in undertaking social research. Draft copies of the interview transcripts are passed to each participant asking that they read through and check the content. They are then asked to return the amended final copy that is then used in the analysis and evaluation. This exemplifies the desire and intent to ensure clarity and accuracy. There is no experience of misconduct at any time during the research process.

Establishing trust is a key factor when undertaking research (Griffin, Yancey & Armstrong-Mensah, 2013). Trust emphasizes the importance of transparency, truth and

honesty. Transparency is associated with the rule of law, human rights, anti-corruption, environmental protection, democratic participation and economic efficiency (Vaughn & Ala'i, 2014). Transparency incorporates openness, accountability and communication into the research (Ssonko, 2010). The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) refers to the term truth as *"the real facts about a situation"*. However, a challenge of undertaking social research is that responses may rely on participants being able to remember how they felt and what they experienced at a particular time in the past. They may feel that they have answered accurately, truthfully and honestly. However, it is difficult to remember details of events only a few minutes ago, let alone several days, weeks or months in the past. Participants may be subject to memory errors and/ or they may have difficulty remembering over a period of time. Furthermore, the participant may have expressed their own perception, relying on self-understanding, rather than on the actual recall of feelings and experience. However, this is acknowledged as a limitation when undertaking social research.

Responsibility: The BPS (2018) code of ethics points out the need for awareness of responsibility that ensures trust is not abused and power of influence is managed properly. Research undertaken should consider the standpoint and welfare of all stakeholders involved in the study. The researcher(s) undertaking this study are employed by a university in the United Kingdom (UK) and recognize that they are not only personally accountable, but also accountable to maintaining the high ethical standards commensurate with the university and with the professional organisations they represent. Furthermore, there is no funding from external bodies that may influence findings, analysis and evaluation. Therefore, it is considered that there is no conflict of interest that could influence the outcome of this study.

The BPS (2018) ethical factors identified above reflects upon the ethical components incorporated into this study. The BPA (2014) also advise that those who may participate in a study should be provided with information explaining the purpose, type of data being collected, method of collecting data, confidentiality and anonymity, compliance with data protection, time commitment that is expected from participants, the opportunity to withdraw and to have data destroyed, potential risks, name of lead researcher together with contact information, how the data will be used, potential benefits of the study, how results will be made available to participants. The aforementioned are applied to this study and discussion is provided below reflecting ethical implications in further detail.

4.2 Informed consent

Consent is seeking someone's agreement to engage in the research. Informed consent is where the participant consents to take part having a clear understanding of the study (Wilson, 2014). The BPS (2014) advise that where data are gathered, as part of a research project, consent should be

freely provided by participants. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) point out that consent lies across a continuum from: lack of consent, to implied consent, through to informed consent. Lack of consent refers to the participant lacking knowledge or to the application of deception being used when collecting the data. Implied consent assumes that the participant has given consent by simply returning a questionnaire. Informed consent is about getting permission before a person participates in the study. It is where the participant willingly and freely consents to take part, allowing data gathered to be included in the study. It is providing enough information to help participants make an informed decision as to whether or not they wish to take part. It ensures that they are informed that participation is voluntary. It is respecting basic human rights. Informed consent should always be obtained when undertaking social research, research with people.

When the invitation is sent out via LinkedIn, academics are advised that participation in the study is voluntary. They are advised of the purpose of the study, who the researcher(s) are and the organization that the researcher(s) represent. Information is also provided as to the time that is required from the participant and the benefits that are sought from the research. Participants are also informed of their right to confidentiality and that they can withdraw at any time before publication. Furthermore, the first question that participants are asked to respond to in the questionnaire/ survey is: *"Please confirm that you are willing to take part in this questionnaire/ survey and giving your consent to the information being used within the research a) Yes b) No. Please note that if the answer is no, please do not submit the questionnaire/ survey"*. Participants are therefore able to make their own decision as to whether or not they wish to engage.

Invitations to take part in interviews are sent out at the same time as invitations to participate in the questionnaire advising that participants can withdraw at any time prior to the publication of data. Participants are asked to e mail the lead researcher to confirm that they wish to take part and their names and e mail addresses are placed on an excel spreadsheet that is kept on a password protected computer. Following the completion of the first phase (questionnaire), a reminder e mail is sent to those who are willing to take part in an interview advising that they have free choice to participate and can withdraw at any time before publication. Participants are reminded again when a copy of the interview transcript is forwarded to them to check, amend, agree and return. At no time are participants pressurized to engage in the study and no covert or coercive measures are used. Participants are, therefore, well informed and free to make their own decision as to whether or not they wish to engage in the study.

4.3 Plagiarism

With access to so much information on line it is very easy to copy information directly into research findings, analysis

and evaluation. Where information is copied and pasted, and the name of sources is removed it implies that this is the work of the researcher. It is passing off someone else's work as the researchers own. It is plagiarism. Farrimond (2013) points out that plagiarism is a form of stealing that can harm academic integrity bringing the researcher and other stakeholders' reputation into disrepute. It is ethically unacceptable and should be avoided. Checks can be undertaken making use of software such as Turnitin. However, to minimize plagiarism, a simple rule is to reword content, unless it is a definition.

There may be occasions where the researcher copies their own work, using the same words from a previously published document. This is referred to as self-plagiarism. There are differences of opinion as to whether or not self-plagiarism is acceptable. For example, Shamoo & Resnick (2003) refer to self-plagiarism as deceitful and wasteful, while Stewart (2011) points out the impossibility of stealing (plagiarizing) from yourself. The safest approach is to avoid self-plagiarism.

4.4 Vulnerable people and those with disabilities

In the "*code of human research ethics*", the BPS (2014) refer to the importance of safeguards to protect those who may be vulnerable that include: children under 16 years of age, those with learning or communication difficulties, patients who may be in care, members of the public who may be held in custody or are on probation and, those who may engage in illicit behaviour. In such circumstances, the person undertaking the study should consult, parents/guardians, relatives and, relevant professionals as considered appropriate. The Mental Capacity Act (2005) explains each person has the right to make their own decisions. However, this is subject to the person having the capacity to make that decision unless it is proved to the contrary. The Mental Capacity Act (2005) advises that in England and Wales approximately 2 million people are thought to lack the capacity to make decisions. Care should be given so as not to intrude upon the privacy of the vulnerable participants. Where studies are undertaken, in the UK, that include those who may be considered vulnerable, the researcher(s) should ensure that they have a disclosure and barring service (DBS) check (formerly known as a criminal records bureau, CRB) check. Protecting and respecting the dignity and rights of those who are vulnerable is therefore an important ethical factor to consider when undertaking social research (ESRC, 2019). If outside the UK, it is worth checking the country's own legislation as well as professional/ institutional guidelines.

This study involves academics from universities around the world. Whereas they may have physical disabilities, subject to them having access to the online facilities (including questionnaire, e mail communication, and video conferencing), they are able to participate and have the mental capacity to make their own decisions. No participant is shown to be under the age of 18 and no person with

learning disabilities participated. Therefore, CRB/ DBS checks are not required.

Interviews are incorporated into phase 2 of this study and consideration is given to participants being interviewed that may have disabilities. Each participant is asked prior to the interview his/ her preferred means of communication as either by Skype or by landline telephone. Undertaking interviews using Skype and landline telephone is found to be extremely helpful, facilitating ease of communication, as the interviews are held in an environment, and under circumstances, in which the person, with the disability, feels most comfortable. For example, two of those interviewed acknowledge that they have physical disabilities (one person is in a wheelchair and the other confirms they had difficulties walking). In each of these instances Skype is used, and the participant chooses a place and time they prefer for the interview to take place.

4.5 Voluntary participation, confidentiality and, anonymity

A major principle of research ethics is that participation in the study should be voluntary (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Voluntary participation is allowing free will in which to decide as to whether or not someone wishes to take part in the study (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher should advise that participants have the right to withdraw or refuse to take part in the study (ESRC, 2019). In this study, the sample is self-selecting. Participation is voluntary, and each person has the capacity to make their own decision as to whether or not they would like to take part in this study.

It is important to protect those engaged in the study from possible harm. Therefore, throughout the study anonymity and confidentiality are maintained. Anonymity is protecting individuals and organisations from identification. Names and means of personal identification are changed or removed so as to maintain anonymity. Participants are directed to the online questionnaire via an embedded message on, the online professional network, LinkedIn. The questionnaire is completed online ensuring that participants could not be identified. Furthermore, the content of the responses does not identify participants.

Confidentiality means that personal information is not shared with others. When the e mail is sent out inviting participants to take part in the study, they are asked to respond by e mail to the researcher if they wished to volunteer to take part in an interview. Their names and e mail addresses are kept on a spreadsheet and a follow up e mail is sent to them later during the study, asking if they still wanted to participate and advising that they could withdraw at any time before the data is incorporated into published documentation. Two of those who are subsequently contacted decline to take part. 11 academics who participate in the interviews are advised that the interviews are recorded on a digital device that will be kept in a secure locked draw in the researcher's home. They are also informed that the interview

is directly between the researcher and participant and that no one else is present. To maintain impartiality no person that is interviewed is previously known to the researcher(s). The interview is then transcribed, and the names of participants are removed and replaced by codes. A copy of the transcript is sent to the participant by e mail asking them to check and make changes. The digital recording and the spreadsheet with participant names and e mails are then deleted. Subsequent writing up of the findings maintains reference to codes. The study therefore seeks to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity are provided throughout the study and that participation is voluntary.

4.6 Mental and physical stress and discomfort

Most behavioral research may be innocuous (Leary, 1995). However, conducting research with human participants may involve physical or mental stress and should only be undertaken if thorough research is undertaken to find alternative ways to minimize possible discomfort or danger (American Psychological Association, 1973). It is, therefore, important to identify and address possible circumstances in which participants may feel mental or physical stress and discomfort. This should be clearly identified and explained within the ethical application and review before commencement of the research.

In this study, participants are advised that they are under no pressure to answer questions raised in interviews and that they can withdraw if they so wish. Throughout the study care, courtesy, and due consideration are given to all participants with the desire to remove factors or circumstances in which they may experience mental and/ or physical discomfort. For example, consideration is given to the physical environment in which questionnaires and interviews take place. The questionnaire is online, and the participant can complete in an environment of their own choosing. The first two pilot interviews are carried out person to person either in the participant's office or in an empty seminar room. It is evident that they are distracted by e mails on their personal computer (PC) and, notwithstanding a note on the outside of the door, students or staff members enter the room interrupting the flow of each interview. It is apparent that each participant feels irritable and is in some discomfort. In agreement with the participants, subsequent interviews are undertaken either by Skype or by landline telephone. The majority of the interviews take place outside normal office hours and either in the participant's office or from their home. This appears to minimize distraction and discomfort.

Participation is voluntary, and participants are advised that they do not need to answer questions if they do not wish to. Due care and thought are, therefore, given to possible circumstances in which the participant or stakeholder may face mental and/ or physical stress and discomfort.

4.7 Giving advice

The BPA (2017a) refers to the need to establish good relationships and trust with clients maintaining professional boundaries. The BPA (2017a) adds the importance of safeguarding participants well-being, health, and human rights. This includes giving advice. The BPA (2014) states that giving advice is ethically acceptable if it is intrinsic to the study. However, this needs to be agreed in advance as part of the ethics review.

When undertaking research, evidence may emerge that identifies physical or psychological problems that the participant is not aware of. A participant may seek advice concerning personal matters associated with education, health, behaviour, and/ or personality. Giving advice can easily happen especially when participants seek immediate answers (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2007). Under such circumstances, it is important that a referral route is prepared in advance. Due care and consideration need to be given to such circumstances and caution is recommended. In the first instance there is a responsibility to inform the participant if it is considered that their well-being may be compromised. Further, thought needs to be given to whether or not the advice is warranted and whose needs are best served when advice is given (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2007). If the researcher feels they are not qualified to support and advise, the participant should be directed to the appropriate professional services.

This study does not include giving advice to participants. Furthermore, no participant seeks personal advice during this study and there are no specific circumstances that emerge that raise cause of concern by the lead researcher.

4.8 Right to withdraw

As advised by the ESRC (2019), participation in this study is voluntary and coercion is not used. No financial payments are made to induce academics to take part. Academics are directed to the online questionnaire via the invite placed in LinkedIn. They are informed that they can withdraw at any time until they click on the final submit button at the foot of the questionnaire. Furthermore, a statement is placed at the beginning of the questionnaire informing participants that taking part is voluntary and that they can withdraw. Those who are invited to take part in the interviews are also informed in the initial invite to take part in the study that they can withdraw at any prior to publication of data. This is repeated in the follow up e mail to participants asking if they still wanted to take part. At the beginning of each interview the participant is reminded again.

4.9 Dissemination

Dissemination is ensuring there is transparency in the process of communicating information, data, knowledge and research findings (Briggle & Mitcham, 2012; Clinard, 1983). The BPS (2014) advise that the research undertaken should be disseminated, maximizing the benefits of the study from the point of inception. Kara (2018) advises that there should

be more than one method to disseminate helping to increase accessibility to those who may be interested in the content.

In this study dissemination of findings is communicated via conferences, academic journal papers and books. (For example: Bowen, 2019; Bowen, Pilkington & Rose, 2016; Bowen, Rose & Pilkington, 2016; 2017; 2018). This paper adds to the dissemination of information associated with the study.

4.10 General Data Protection

The main principle of data protection is to respect the privacy and rights of stakeholders associated with the research. All member states of the European Union agreed to the implementation of the Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC) that came into effect in 1995 (Eur-Lex, 1995). The purpose of the Directive is to help protect the processing of personal data. However, since that time there have been substantial changes in digital technology. To try and address these gaps, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is implemented in 2018 stressing the role of trust, accountability, engagement and transparency within the research while ensuring that the processing of data meets privacy expectations together with ethical and legal requirements (Data Protection Act, 2018; GDPR, 2018). This applies to all European states whether data is kept in digital or paper format. Whereas the Data Protection Act (2018) is not specifically designed for research it is important to follow advice and guidance provided in the GDPR (Guide to Data Protection, 2019; Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation, 2019).

Throughout this study data is stored securely on a username and password protected personal computer in the UK. Means of personal identification are removed from digital and paper documentation and replaced by codes, protecting individual and organizational rights. Furthermore, no information that could identify individuals has been or would be taken outside of the European Union at any time.

4.11 Deception

Wilson (2014) states the importance of the researcher's honesty throughout the study. The BPS (2014) advise that participants should not be misled without there being medical or scientific justification. However, Goode (1996) adds that certain types of deception is necessary so as to gather data. For example, in studies where tests are carried out on a new drug, a number of participants may be given a placebo in the belief that they are being treated. Whereas there is argument that deception may be incorporated into certain studies it is important to acknowledge potential risk and to avoid harm to participants.

Boynton, Portnoy & Johnson (2013) point out that there are two main approaches in the practice of deception, direct and indirect. Direct deception is associated with deliberate misinformation that may include manipulation, false

feedback, use of accomplices and, misleading descriptions or instructions associated with the study. Indirect deception is where information is not conveyed to fully or partially participants.

It is important to avoid deception that may mislead, or deliberately misinform, stakeholders that are associated with the research. It is, also important that findings are not misrepresented or falsified. For example, leaving information out can lead to distortion. Furthermore, the researcher may create false impressions disguising the true purpose of the study (Wilson, 2014). Studies, therefore, need to be undertaken in a methodical way with the purpose of balancing the findings in the analysis and evaluation. Findings should be clearly reported, avoiding possible misunderstanding and deception.

Every effort is made in this study to ensure clear communication is provided to participants and that there is no direct/ indirect deception.

5. LIMITATIONS

Undertaking social research can give rise to ethical challenges that may occur at any time during the research process that may impact upon stakeholders. It relies on all parties involved in the research maintaining ethical standards, integrity and expectations that commensurate with academic studies.

No matter how well an academic study is conducted, there are likely to be limitations. Limitations may be influences or circumstances that can impact upon the findings, analysis and outcomes of the study that restrict the credibility and generalization of findings (Burns & Grove, 2011). For example, whereas it is important to maintain a position of neutrality, the researcher and/ or participant may be influenced by personal experience and maintain views or beliefs that influence the findings, analysis and evaluation. Reflexivity (self-scrutiny) is an important factor that is acknowledged in this study. It is being aware of the relationship between participants and the researcher (Pillow, 2003). The lead researcher is white, male and in his 60s. He lives in "middle England" and is a lecturer at a university in the UK. Whereas he has experience of working with others from diverse backgrounds it is acknowledged that he is unable to speak from another person's point of view. This study seeks to hear from others, their own thoughts and stories, with the desire to gain a greater understanding of the way academics think and feel and to try and reflect that in this study. The researcher/ author, in this study, sees himself as being both an insider and outsider. He is shaped by the academic environment in which he is in. However, he does not necessarily have the background, experience and understanding of others. It is also acknowledged that the interpretations given to the quantitative and qualitative findings may be influenced by the author's personal background and experience. However, the desire is that this

does not happen. Being mindful of his positionality is, therefore, an important factor within this study with the desire to avoid influence and personal perceptions and to be aware of his own motives.

Dilemmas may occur where conflicts arise. For example, obtaining informed consent is required where the participant writes to the researcher confirming their willingness to take part. However, if the study is being carried out, via an online questionnaire, an alternative may need to be found. In this study participants are asked to check a box at the beginning of the questionnaire confirming that they are happy to take part. Whereas it is acknowledged that informed consent is required, allowing participants to check a button in the questionnaire minimizes the personal identification. They are also reminded at the end of the questionnaire that by clicking on the submit button they acknowledge their willingness to take part. Participants therefore have more than one opportunity in which they provide informed consent.

A further limitation is that participants may have had different views, thoughts and understanding of the Likert scales in the questionnaire/ survey. It is not possible to ascertain the base level for each participant. This could, therefore, influence the responses, analysis and evaluation.

Another limitation associated with this study is that each interview is undertaken using Skype or telephone. Whereas Skype allows each person to see each other, it is two dimensional, and only the face and upper part of the body is seen. When using the telephone, it is only the content and tone of voice that is heard. However, it does provide personal interaction between people when they are located thousands of miles apart which may not otherwise be possible.

Across culture, emotions may be “*culturally dependent*” (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2012:28). Cultural differences are likely to occur in studies such as this where people come from different backgrounds, experiences, and countries. Cultural differences may have an influence on how people cope as well as personality (For example: Connor-Smith & Calvete, 2004; Sica, Novara, Dorz and Sanavio, 1997; Wadsworth, Rieckmann, Benson & Compas, 2004). This is acknowledged as a further limitation in this study.

There, therefore, needs to be an acknowledgement of personal limitations and competencies of all stakeholders. Limitations identified include individual differences and challenges in generalizing beyond the sample size. Fuzzy generalizations are, therefore, made that replace the certainty of scientific generalizations that help contribute to theory and future research (Bassey, 1999; 2001).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Ethics is central to academic research. It is, therefore, important the researcher should have relevant training and development of skills and knowledge. It is recommended that prior to, and during the study, workshops and seminars

should be attended and the knowledge gained incorporated into the study. The skills and knowledge can also have a positive impact where skills and knowledge in ethics can be transferred to working environment (Wilson, 2014). Workshops and seminars have been undertaken as part of this study and continue to be attended, ensuring that the skills and knowledge continue to be improved.

Researchers are often allied to an institution and are their representatives within academia. It is, therefore, important not to bring the stakeholders into disrepute. Acting and behaving ethically is not just the responsibility of the researcher. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders involved in the study (Graham, 2015).

Codes of practice and guidance are important tools when research is undertaken. However, it is important to think ethically and not to rely in the belief that it is simply obeying ethical standards and rules (Pederson, 1997). A valuable thought to remember when making use of ethical codes of practice is that they allow for flexibility to reflect the nature of the study being undertaken. They are not directives and are provided to help inform.

This study provides a little more information to support research in this area. Whereas there are no expectations of generalization of the findings, it is felt reasonable that the findings from this study can be expanded to apply to a larger sample from which fuzzy generalization can be made (Bassey, 1999, 2001). Further investigation is recommended that may help add to the existing academic literature, contributing to future research and theory.

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