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Applying the CDI Code of Ethics to practitioner research

The following article is adapted from the author's PhD thesis-in-progress.

The research competence of a career development professional is closely related to their promotion of the career development sector. While lax values in a researcher risk bringing the sector into ill-repute, the converse, a rigorous dedication to ethical practice, can promote the sector, highlighting how the career development researcher-practitioner has unique strengths which can be harnessed for wider benefit. Not least, membership of the CDI brings with it the expectation that all members will adhere to the professional body's *Code of Ethics*, an updated version of which was issued in January 2019.

As is the case for all ethical codes, the *CDI Code of Ethics* "is not a rulebook, it does not list procedures to follow for every circumstance but is intended as a guide to professionals in all aspects of their professional lives" (CDI, n.d.). This article demonstrates how the points of the CDI's ethical code can be mapped on to practitioner-research.

Point of the CDI Code of Ethics	Application to practitioner research
Accessibility	<p>Accessible research requires a commitment to inclusion at every stage. This includes, for example, the use of inclusive language and adaptable/flexible formats for theory, fieldwork and dissemination of findings.</p> <p>There must be the ability for practitioners without academic expertise or academic networks to access the findings of research. Research findings should be openly accessible where possible and promoted to fellow professionals. Dissemination opportunities should be taken up which include in-person sector-specific professional development conferences or online professional training, such as webinars.</p>
Accountability	<p>The <i>Code of Ethics</i> can be used within fieldwork, to demonstrate the commitment to ethical practice and enhancing visibility of accountability, for example by signposting it within research interviews and participant information sheets.</p> <p>By explicitly presenting oneself as a member of the CDI and upholding the <i>Code of Ethics</i>, the practitioner-researcher furthers the standing and good name of their professional body.</p>
Autonomy	Fieldwork undertaken should align with core principles of careers practice and at no time should the researcher intervene with unsolicited advice or give biased direction.
Competence	Professional development activity relating to research skills may be necessary prior to undertaking research to ensure fitness to practice as a practitioner-researcher.

Confidentiality	<p>All research participants can expect to have their data and personal information treated with the same confidentiality as would be afforded to them as career guidance and development clients and in line with the <i>General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act (2018)</i>.</p> <p>Researchers must undertake appropriate disclosure, in line with the client group/research participants as appropriate and to meet the requirements of the <i>Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006)</i>.</p>
Continuous Professional Development	<p>Researcher reflexivity, a specific form of critical self-awareness, should be paramount, perhaps through a research diary to enable identification of competency issues and professional development needs.</p> <p>The performance criteria and knowledge and understanding expectations of each of the <i>National Occupational Standards for the Career Development Sector (The CDI, 2014)</i> can be used to identify professional development needs.</p> <p>Engagement with sector-led researcher training, alongside a willingness to share and train other professionals in researcher tools and techniques.</p>
Duty of Care – to Clients, Colleagues, Organisations and Self	<p>Engagement with practitioner-researcher communities of practice.</p> <p>Role expectations must be clarified to reiterate explicitly the difference between research interviews and career guidance and development interventions.</p> <p>Cognisance of any employer codes or other affiliations that apply to the individual researcher and regulations relating to the research context. This could include, for example, when working with research participants from another sector.</p>
Equality	<p>All research should comply with <i>The Equality Act (2010)</i>, to ensure fair treatment of all and promote a fair and more equal society. All research should focus on producing socially-just discussion. Findings of research may help enable public sector bodies to fulfil their requirement for Public Sector Equality Duty and other duties.</p> <p>Research should be designed to ensure recruitment from as diverse a group as possible.</p> <p>Researchers should seek to make visible the experiences of underrepresented groups. To this end researchers should be suitably equipped to identify and work with underrepresented individuals and a commitment shown to ongoing professional development in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.</p>

Impartiality	<p>Research should be undertaken independently and clarity maintained in relation to the researcher's affiliated institution(s) and employment(s).</p> <p>If the research is funded, the sponsor should be made explicit and output should not be swayed in the direction of the funders needs or objectives.</p>
Transparency	<p>It should be articulated to all stakeholders/research participants that data collected on a participant as part of the research is open to their review if requested, in line with the <i>Freedom of Information Act</i> (2000).</p>
Trustworthiness	<p>Upon completion of a project, the researcher-practitioner should deliver on all promised outputs.</p>

Ultimately ethical practice is the continuous attention to the upholding of ethical values, and explicit reference to these values when faced with an ethical dilemma. This encompasses much more than a research study achieving ethical approval and the presumption that researchers intend to act ethically. Yet however robustly planned a piece of research is, and however keenly an individual is motivated to act ethically, the unexpected can occur. It is in the response one takes to ethical challenges that ethical values can be proven. There will always be times when ethical practice is limited to individual accountability and in such scenarios the CDI's 9 step framework for ethical decision-making can be applied.

To be put in a box

The CDI's 9 step framework for ethical decision-making:

Step 1: Identify the problem

Step 2: Apply the *Code of Ethics*

Step 3: Review professional literature

Step 4: Consult with experienced others

Step 5: Generate potential courses of action

Step 6: Select the most appropriate course

Step 7: Evaluate the selected course

Step 8: Implement the course

Step 9: Monitor and evaluate

(*The CDI*, 2015, online)

End of box

For further reading on this topic, including specific ethical guidance for the career development professional as a practitioner-researcher see Johnson and Neary (2016).

Focused on human participants in research, it highlights key ethical considerations: informed

consent, coercion, incentives, withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality, risk assessment, debriefing and confirmation.

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