Approving or Improving Research Ethics in Management Journals

Michelle Greenwood

Abstract Despite significant scholarly debate about knowledge production in the management discipline through the peer-review journal processes, there is minimal discussion about the ethical treatment of the research subject in these publication processes. In contrast, the ethical scrutiny of management research processes within research institutions is often highly formalized and very focused on the protection of research participants. Hence, the question arises of how management publication processes should best account for the interests of the research subject, both in the narrow sense of specific research participants and in the broader understanding of the subject of the research. This question is particularly pertinent in light of significant codification of research ethics within academic institutions, and increasing self-reflection within the management discipline about the "good" of management research and education. Findings from a survey and interviews with management journal editors (and others involved in journal publication) reveal a complex scenario; many editors believe that a formalized requirement within the journal publication process may have detrimental outcomes and, in fact, diminish the ethical integrity of management scholarship. Building on these findings, this paper argues that ethical concern for the research subject merely in terms of institutional rule compliance and avoidance of harm to individual participants is insufficient, and calls for explicitly positive engagement with both the individual and the collective subject of management research should receive due ethical consideration. An alternative model involving reflexive ethical consideration of research subjects across the publication process—with implications for role of authors, reviewers, editors, and research subjects—is outlined.

Keywords Research ethics · Publication ethics · Academic ethics · Human subjects · Ethics committees · Research education · Research training

Introduction

Controversy abounds regarding peer-review journal publication processes in the management discipline. High stakes are raised when discussing the quality of the knowledge base of an academic discipline and outcomes for deeply invested individuals and institutions (Raelin 2008). Much of this debate surrounds the roles and responsibilities of editors, reviewers, and authors (and occasionally publishers) (Bedeian 2003; Prichard 2009). What seems missing from debate in management journals are ethical considerations of the research subject, both in the narrow notion of specific research participants and in the broader conception of the subject of the research. This lack of focus sits in contrast with the fact that many research institutions have formalized protocols for the ethical treatment of research participants. Additionally, the oblique introduction of similar formalized protocols into management journals' publication process seems to have escaped scholarly attention.

Recently there has been widespread interest in management research ethics (Bell and Bryman 2007) including calls for clearer and more transparent procedures to handle issues of research governance (with particular focus on ethical standards in the conduct of non-medical research

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involving human participants) and discussion of what sort of independent ethical scrutiny might help improve practice (Tinker and Coomber 2004). Furthermore, universities and researchers are under increasing pressure from governments and society—in many countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand—to both be more cost effective and have greater social impact. On the one hand, there are expectations for research transparency, responsibility, and socially effectiveness, whilst on the other hand, changes in the funding and management of universities bring about narrowing and homogenizing of research and publication activities. Given this juggling act, it is paramount to keep an eye on the ethical nature of research endeavors. That publication and editorial decision-making in management journals significantly influence ethical standards of management research, which have been long recognized (Von Glinow and Novelli Jr 1982). Whilst the broader goal of this paper is to contribute to the ethical nature of academic management research and publication, the specific aim is to determine how best to account for the interests of research subjects in the management journal publication process.

Management journals do not routinely require submitting authors to declare institutional ethics approval for empirical research. However, there are moves within academic management publishing by some publishers and editors toward requirement of such a declaration (hereafter *declaration*). The introduction of this seemingly minor protocol is purportedly a means of enhancing the ethical treatment of research participants and concomitantly the ethical integrity of management research. Despite the imperative to address urgent ethical concerns in management research, there has been minimal debate about this impending intervention specifically or ethical treatment of research the subject more generally. There is insufficient knowledge as to how this protocol could affect management research (i.e., there is incompleteness of knowledge), and more broadly, there is inadequate consideration as to whether this approach, which parallels biomedical disciplines, would adequately address ethical responsibilities toward the research subjects within the heterogeneous management discipline (i.e., there is inadequacy of reflexivity) (Grant and Pollock 2011). Importantly, of concern here is not only the ethical treatment of the individual *participant subject*, but also the ethical position of management research vis-à-vis the research population or *collective subject* of the research; thus, the very core and purpose of management research are under scrutiny.

Henceforth, this paper addresses two interrelated questions: (1) how should management journals account for the interests of research subjects and (2) whether this should be undertaken though the requirement that authors declare institutional ethics approval. Findings from a survey of journal editors and interviews with journal editors and publisher, representatives reveal a complex scenario; indeed, many editors believe such a formal requirement would have the opposite of the desired outcome and, in fact, diminish the ethical integrity of management scholarship. As an alternative to a formal requirement of declaration, a less prescriptive and more reflexive protocol, which is achieved through heightened debate and training and is imbedded across the publication process—hence involves editors, reviewers and authors—is proposed.

Ethical Treatment of Research Subjects in Management Journal Publication

Debate rages about the "lightening rod" that is the peer-review publication process (Raelin 2008, p. 124). Of particular concern is the "triadic tension" among the goals of editors, referees, and authors (Bedeian 2004, p. 198). Negligible attention, however, is given to the interests of research participants in the scholarly debate on management publishing; indeed, according to Wright and Wright (2002, p. 174), management research has "all too often neglected our most important stakeholder group, the actual research participants themselves." The irony of low consideration being paid to the very subjects we seek to empower has been noted (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008; Prichard 2012). This omission sits in contrast with a strong focus on formalized, compliance-oriented management of human research ethics in universities and, increasingly, in management journals themselves.

Editors, Reviewers and Authors……oh, and Subjects

The roles and responsibilities of editors, reviewers, and authors in the peer-review system have been much debated in scholarly business journals (see for example Borkowski and Welsh 1998). Bedeian (2004) argues that, rather being than a neutral objective institutional mechanism that establishes "scientific" truth (as it is often fallaciously believed to be), the peer-review system is a political system based on social transactions and institutional pressures resulting in socially constructed knowledge. Multiple actors and multiple interactions within research communities produce not only our knowledge but also of understanding or the research subject (Hardy et al. 2001). Certain actors (including but not limited to editors, reviewers, and authors) are often noted for having vested interests and varying powers to pursue these interests, which may influence the acquittal of their formal roles and responsibilities. By developing research protocols that protect research participants, research institutions implicitly acknowledge that such participants typically have vested

interest in the processes and/or outcomes of the research in which they participate but limited power to directly pursue or safeguard their interests.

Editors of journals have particular ethical responsibilities that are broadly aimed at ensuring the academic integrity of the research that is published in their journal. These responsibilities are acquitted in part through formal processes involving explicit ethical expectations of submitting authors. Explicit ethical expectations of submitting authors (e.g., that they do not submit plagiarized material or falsified results) are often specified by the journal in their submission instructions, and these are required to be declared by authors at submission and/or publication. Usually reviewers play no part in this process; they may be aware of the requirement for authors' declaration on these ethical considerations and rely on these being fulfilled when doing a review, but they rarely have specific roles or responsibilities in ensuring these considerations are met.

Although it may be an implicit expectation, the ethical treatment of research subjects used in the research is not usually an explicit ethical expectation of management journals. Currently most management journals tend not to ask submitting authors to declare whether the research upon which their paper is based has been approved by an institutional review board or institutional ethics committees (hereafter *ethics committee*). This is in contrast with editorial policy for journals from science disciplines (e.g., medicine, psychology, and nursing) which do require authors to affirm ethics committee approval (Rowan-Legg et al. 2009; Watson 2006; Wegman and Major 2009) and despite the fact that many academic institutions require such approval for all research involving human subjects regardless of academic discipline (Mamotte and Wassenaar 2009).

Constructing the Research Subject

What of the hidden research subject in management studies? How can we best understand this "subject" and therefore the ethical considerations to which they are due? The notion of an identifiable, stable, self-contained subject—a subject that is "real"—has been challenged by understandings of subject as inseparable (i.e., not independent) from the research or researcher and constituted through any number of subject positions particular to situation, time, and space (Alvesson 2003; Cunliffe 2003; Wray-Bliss 2003). As noted by Scheurich and McKenzie (2005), Foucault identifies a fundamental contradiction within modern rational methodologies of simultaneously having the agentic subject as both the doer and the object of doing, both passive and active, and both the subject and the object of history. Research communities comprising networks of editors, reviews, and authors are not only

implicated in the production of knowledge but also the research subject (Hardy et al. 2001; Wray-Bliss 2003). Indeed, researchers create research subjects via research processes and through engagement with communities of researchers. Following Hardy et al. (2001), we can understand the research subject not merely as the participant of a research project but rather as a subject identifiable in relation to a network of actors and institutions involved in creating the research. The research subject can hold multiple subjectivities; for example, the research subject may be understood as vulnerable and in need of protection (e.g., by ethics committees) and/or as having power (e.g., through their capacity to consent or withdraw from the research).

Furthermore, organizational research participants are also subjects of, and subject to, the organization to which they belong (and are often dependent upon this for the livelihood). Such research participants are not autonomous individuals free to respond without regard for any number of organizational factors such as employment security, relationships with co-workers, and loyalty to the group. Likewise, when entering organizations, researchers participate in *a priori* relationships and structures that influence their actions. Being "low in the corporate hierarchy," organizational power structures may limit researchers' capacity to act in response to ethical issues if they do arise (Giacalone and Rosenfeld 1987).

If we accept the notion that "the research" and "the researched" are entwined in a network or relationships, then we no longer view the research subject merely as an independent entity in need (or not) of protection. The idea that the research ethics should address the interests of both individual subjects (those who directly participate in the research) and collective subjects (those who may be indirectly affected in the future by the research), and that these interests/subjects may overlap or be in tension, is well accepted in biomedical research. Indeed, much debate exists in clinical research about the extent to which it is permissible to subsume the well-being of the individual subject for that of the greater good (Pullman and Wang 2001). In some cases, the construct of collective subject is considered to be a proxy for a particular community or society more generally.

There is a moral imperative to give consideration to the subject beyond the individuals' participation in a circumscribed project. "Committed-to-participant" research (Wright and Wright 2002, p. 173) though laudable, is insufficient due to the fundamental fallacy of the separation of "science" from ethics (Freeman 2002). In the words of Freeman (2002, p. 188), "Human participants, both pretheorizing and posttheorizing, are the center of the drama." It is our responsibility to be fully cognizant that the human/s we are "researching" live with the social and political contexts that we influence (Freeman 2002; Hardy et al. 2001).

Formalization of Ethics in Management Journals

Protection of "the privacy, dignity, well-being, and freedom of research participants" is explicitly noted in the code of ethics of the US-based Academy of Management (AOM 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, there are indications of moves within management journals to place more emphasis on explicit ethical codes. Increasingly, there is the requirement for authors to declare institutional ethics committee approval for the ethical protocols of research based on research subjects. The implicit purpose of this declaration is to encourage ethical research. In some cases, this requirement has been actively introduced by editors (Eden 2010), but in many cases, the protocol has been introduced by the publishers, often concomitant with the journal being signed up for membership of the Committee for Publication Ethics (COPE 2011). If effective, a requirement of declaration would shape the nature of the research submitted and published by management journals. Yet, this intervention into the publishing process has gone largely unnoticed.

Many management journals are now members of the Committee for Publication Ethics (COPE), and some declare this membership on their websites.[1] Some large international publishers (including Elsevier, Wiley–Blackwell, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Palgrave Macmillan, and Wolters Kluwer) have signed up their whole stable of journals as members of COPE (rather than individual journals electing to sign up). Hence some management journals, and their editors *qua* agents of the journal, are in fact members of COPE without necessarily knowing or agreeing to membership. All COPE members are expected to follow their *Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors* (COPE 2011a), which in Clause 10.2 states that "Editors should seek assurances that all research has been approved by an appropriate body (e.g. research ethics committee, institutional review board)" (COPE 2011b)

Furthermore, leading management journals are taking initiatives to introduce ethics codes which address, amongst many other aspects, the issue of declaration. For example the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) introduced a code of ethics in 2007 based on codes adopted by science and medical journals. This was the first code written specifically for, and adopted, by a scholarly business journal (COPE 2011b, p. 7). Every author submitting to JIBS is asked to confirm that they have read and followed the *Code of Ethics for Authors* which addresses the issue of human subject research including compliance

"with the relevant Human Subject Protocol requirements at the Author's university" (Eden 2010).

The practices of leading journals would be expected to influence other journals. It has been noted that isomorphic pressures on academic institutions, arising from academic ranking systems, cause adoption of dominant institutional practices (Adler and Harzing 2009; Clark and Wright 2007), and there is no reason to suggest that journals would not also be subject to these pressures with regard to declaration.

Although declaration is a current common practice in science and medicine journals, and potential future practice in management journals, dispute exists as to whether it is effective and appropriate. The academic field of nursing provides an interesting case in point as it is a multi-paradigmatic discipline bridging both science and a social science. A recent debate in the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*[2] (Watson 2006), raised a number of factors for consideration: the vulnerability of the research participant (patients compared with staff or public) (Holzhauser et al. 2008); the veracity of the authors' declaration (Watson 2006); the compliance of the research with the approved protocol (Long and Fallon 2007); the availability and quality of ethics committees in developing countries (Holzhauser et al. 2008; Watson 2006); the extent of editors' responsibilities (Chien 2006); the need for ethical practice to be embedded in research (Uys 2006; Watson 2006); and the shift away from personal responsibility and autonomy of the researcher (Long and Fallon 2007). Furthermore, circumventing of subject protection requirements may be considered a lesser ethical violation than the "cardinal sins" of fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism (Bedeian et al. 2010, p. 216). It is apparent that the formalization of research ethics faces a number of challenges related to the effectiveness of such process to protect human subjects and the ethical integrity of the research.

Challenges Faced by the Formalization of Management Research Ethics

To suggest that management research differs fundamentally in many aspects from science, research is at once an evident and contentious claim. Discourses about medical research ethics and social research ethics differ, and where ethics committees are tied to the medical model of ethical decision-making, qualitative research approaches can be disadvantaged (Bamber and Sappey 2007; Haggerty 2004; Ramcharan and Cutcliffe 2001; Tolich and Fitzgerald

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[1] COPE was established in 1997 by a small group of medical journal editors in the UK but now has over 6,000 members worldwide from all academic fields (COPE 2011a).

[2] The Journal of Clinical Nursing is listed in the ISI Journal Citation Reports© Ranking as (Nursing (Social Science): 2009: 16/70) and (Nursing (Science): 2009: 17/72). It has Impact Factor: 1.194.

2006). Whilst an extensive debate about the approval process is beyond the scope of this paper, it is imperative to note that any claim in support of declaration is dependent upon the integrity of the approval process. As such, the challenges faced by institutional approval processes, with particular regard to management research, are worthy of note.

The assertion that declaration of approval by a relevant institution for human subject research should be required from authors submitting to journals in order to enhance ethical research is predicated on a number of contestable assumptions related to the approval process: (1) that approval bodies are effective and available; (2) that research subjects who need protection will be best protected by both the approval process; and (3) that the ethical integrity of the research is best served by protecting research subjects through formal protocols/the approval process. Whilst first two assumptions are not directly addressed in this study, critiquing them and their tenability are necessary to investigate the third assumption that forms the basis of the research question under examination here.

Availability and Integrity of Ethics Protocols

Based on the World Medical Association's *Declaration of Helsinki* (WMA 1964), many international and national research agencies' guidelines and standards on ethical research are predicated on institutional oversight of human subject research. For example, in Australia the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans is typically implemented by ethics committees which require written informed consent from research participants (Bamber and Sappey 2007). However, the availability and consistency of ethics committee processes vary throughout developed countries. In developing countries approval bodies may not exist or, where they do exist, may not enforce internationally accepted standards (COPE 2008; Cox Macpherson 1999). Reliance on ethical protocols that are derived from international standards does not take into account beliefs and practices that are localized and culturally held. For example, autonomy and informed consent are difficult to achieve in cultures with limited personal choice; in some cultures, individual personhood is secondary to social relationships (Barry 1988). Furthermore, ethics committee approval of a research protocol plan and subsequent report does not ensure that the actual research as undertaken is in compliance. Finally, ethics committees' standards are based on science research models and as such may not accommodate a range of non-science research methodologies and methodological issues. Social scientists in both developed and developing countries may experience ethics review processes as negative because of slow turnaround time, inadequate review, and problems with the centralization of review (Mamotte and Wassenaar 2009). Phenomenological research is particularly victim to rigid, linear, time-based ethics committee demands which are at odds to the very nature of such research (Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006).

Do Ethics Protocols Protect Research Subjects in Management Research?

Research participants in management research do not tend to be exposed to significant intervention (c.f. drug trials), do not tend to be in a pre-existing relationship with the researcher (c.f. doctor–patient), and do not tend to be highly vulnerable (c.f. children, terminally ill patients) as is often the case in medical research. Management research is typically seen to involve a hands-off intervention (e.g., survey, interview) of a fully rational and non-dependent subject (e.g., a manager or employee of a company). As such, it is often suggested that such subjects need less protection (Holzhauser et al. 2008; Watson 2006). Well-designed approval processes should be nuanced enough to take this into account, for example, the fast-track approval for this current study due to its low risk nature at University.

Such a depiction of management research, however, does not reveal the complex interrelationships between researchers, research participants, and other actors with vested interests in the research process. To begin with, it is predicated on positivist epistemological assumptions of a dispassionate objective researcher, with knowledge and expertise to reveal "truths," investigating less knowledgeable passive "objects" or "data" which will not affect or be affected by the "data" collected or people involved (Halse and Honey 2005; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006). Qualitative methodologies, based on non-positivist research paradigms that eschew such assumptions, may be unable to comply with even minimal ethics committee requirements (e.g., *a priori* provision of informed consent or interview questions). Furthermore, participant consent in management research typically, at least in the first instance, means consent of management to be involved in a research project and managers providing "access" to research respondents. This triggers the problem that the potential agency afforded through the informed consent process is mitigated where an individual has been selected and then enrolled, rather than has chosen to be enrolled (Pullman and Wang 2001).

Where research has the potential to be critical of the organization or of management, managers have a vested interest to refuse or control consent either on their own or their employees' behalf (Bamber and Sappey 2007). Thus, when "consent" is granted, the power relationship between researcher and management participants, or other elites,

may be inverted such that the participant has the potential to exclude, manipulate, or deceive the researcher rather than the typical reverse situation (Aldred 2008; Bell and Bryman 2007). Furthermore, management researcher relationships tend to be multiple, complex, and conflicted—extend well beyond the traditional researcher-participant dyad—and are often with powerful organizations or other entities rather than people. In circumstances where persons are dealt with collectively rather than individually, i.e., in organizations, the very notion of informed consent as a way to protect individuals is highly compromised. Hence, it is argued that the "fluidity of consent demands a more reflexive approach" than proffered through conventional protocols (Sin 2005, p. 277).

Do Formal Protocols Protect the Ethical Integrity of Management Research?

As noted earlier, requirement for declaration of ethics approval is predicated on the intention to protect the rights of the research participant and protect the ethical integrity of the research. The previous section raised the concern that declaration will not necessarily protect the rights of research participants. However, even if we assume that research participants can be protected, we cannot assume that this protection necessarily advances the ethical integrity of the research. What if the protection of the individual research participant is in conflict with facilitating research that will be of benefit to the researcher's community or human kind (Bamber and Sappey 2007)?

Ethics committees not only have obligations to research participants (to meet their rights and protect them from harm), but to society (to ensure good quality research is conducted) and to researchers (to treat their proposals with just consideration and respect) (Goodyear-Smith et al. 2002). It has been suggested that ethics committees should account for four ethical principles when considering research proposals: respect for autonomy, non-malfeasance, beneficence, and justice (Goodyear-Smith et al. 2002). In many instances, ethics committees have increasingly focused on the principles of autonomy and non-malfeasance, with the review process more akin to a risk management exercise at the behest of the host institution or funding body, rather than a process that adequately addresses the ethical nature of research (Bell and Bryman 2007; Haggerty 2004; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006). It has been argued that the predominance of the principle of autonomy over research contribution may be inappropriate in many research contexts: in non-western countries with differing religious or social norms (Goodyear-Smith et al. 2002), for non-medical research (Aldred 2008), and for qualitative methodologies (Haggerty 2004).

Lack of understanding, accommodation and respect for qualitative researchers and research methodology by ethics committees established in the medical tradition has been well documented (Halse and Honey 2005; Lincoln and Tierney 2004; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006). For example certain types of research methods, such as action research, make it impossible to obtain informed consent in advance (Bell and Bryman 2007). Creation of such impediments for non-positivist research is ironic given the emphasis these approaches place on reflexivity (i.e., consideration of researchers' roles and responsibilities) and advocacy for the vulnerable (i.e., identification of inequality and subordination and associated possible emancipation) (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008).The concept of "ethics creep" has been used to describe this gradual bureaucratization and institutional control of social research (Bell and Bryman 2007; Skubik and Stening 2009; Stening and Skubik 2007). In their analysis of social research ethics codes, Bell and Bryman (2007) suggest a number of controversies around development of such a code: that it falsely assumes consensus among academics; that it is risk-aversion driven and undermines academic freedom; and that it indicates the absence of trust and deprofessionalization of academic researchers. In short, that research ethics codes of conduct potentially undermine researcher autonomy.

Difficulties in complying with ethics committee processes may result—through modification or abandonment of research projects—in mitigating ethical research or even ethical outcomes (Bamber and Sappey 2007; Haggerty 2004; Halse and Honey 2005; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006). In the words of Halse and Honey (2005, pp. 2155–2156), "reflective ethics and moral action are forestalled when researchers see "ethics" as a barrier, rather than a facilitator, to ethical research." Following Brewis and Wray-Bliss (2008, p. 1524), we see the potential for ethic committee protocols to be viewed as "ethics as hurdle" (i.e., compliance with rules that emphasize the avoidance of harm to respondents) and author declaration as evidence that the hurdle has been jumped. The problem arises when we think that all we need to do to be ethical is jump the hurdles or follow the rules. Reliance on rules potentially reduces researchers' autonomy and consequently their (perceived) responsibility. What logically follows is the long standing caution that social structures and codification of behavior may threaten moral agency by replacing genuine moral responsibility for others with the proxy of rule abiding behavior (Bauman 1993; MacIntyre 1999).

Many critics of ethics committees, however, do not advocate their demise, rather their reform. There is recognition that not only should agreed-upon standards be useful, but they must also be valid. Inclusion of qualitative researchers on ethics committees in order to broaden the institutional understandings of research and introduce greater flexibility and dialog between the committee and

researchers is strongly recommended, and there is evidence that this is happening (Halse and Honey 2005; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006). Furthermore, benefit may arise from introducing ethics codes through heightening awareness of ethical issues and through the process of discussion and debate (Stening and Skubik 2007). In their call for the reform of management research ethics, Bell and Bryman (2007) suggest that codes may be useful for their potential to provide an aspirational agenda rather than enforcement of minimal ethical obligations.

In the context of these shifting and controversial debates about institutionalized supervision of management research ethics, the question of how management journals should address the interests of both the individual and collective research subject requires exploration. This paper undertakes this endeavor by investigating the opinion of key actors in the publication of management journals, namely editors and publishers. Findings from surveys and interviews with management journal editors and publisher representatives are presented and discussed, and implications for research and practice are considered.

Method

The method reported here explains the nature of the sample, the procedure by which data were collected from respondents, and the manner in which the data were analyzed. To begin with, the ethical considerations (vis-à-vis research subjects) for this study are explicitly addressed, which serve to emphasize how a research article might report its procedures and treatment of its subjects. Both the treatment of the individual participant subjects and the collective subject are addressed, the latter being circumscribed by the research purpose. However, it should be noted that the current study is low impact with regard to participating subjects; it involves non-vulnerable research participants and methods unlikely to directly impact these participants. The ethical significance of this study lies more in its potential contribution to the collective subject, which is addressed explicitly in a section called "Ethics and impact of this research" and implicitly throughout the paper.

Ethical Considerations for this Study

This study was approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee as a "low risk project." Consistent with the explicit standards of this ethics committee for this particular category of project, the subjects in this study (management journal editors, publishers and publisher representatives) were not generally considered vulnerable nor were they in any specific relationship with the researcher that would have compromised their autonomy. All

the subjects were fully informed about the nature of the research, the management of the data, that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they were free to withdraw at any time. All the subjects consented to their involvement in the study, whether as interviewees, survey respondents, or both. Supplementary written consent was obtained from several subjects to use additional data (i.e., comments provided by email subsequent to the survey) that were not predicted in the original study protocol. Furthermore, the broad aim of this research is to improve ethical considerations for research subjects of management research generally (not merely the specific subjects of this study).

Interviews of Journal Editors and Publisher Representatives

Ten interviews were undertaken with journal editors and publisher representatives in Australia and the United Kingdom to provide qualitative information to support the design and interpretation of the survey. Three editors and two COPE officers were interviewed pre-survey to aid the development of questionnaire items. Three editors, one publisher, and one COPE officer were interviewed post-survey to aid interpretation of the questionnaire. Convenience sampling was used for editors and publishers, and purposeful sampling was used for COPE officers (Creswell 2003). The interviews were semi structured and of 30–90 min duration. Notes were taken, and summaries made immediately following the interviews. This material was thematically analyzed without the use of computer software.

Survey of Journal Editors

Sample

The sample for this study was generated from the UK Association of Business Schools (ABS) compiled journal list. Of the 23 business sub-disciplines on the ABS list, 12 sub-disciplines were selected as management related by two expert researchers (the researchers selected sub-disciplines independently and reached consensus where there was disagreement). Table 1 lists these sub-disciplines. From the 12 sub-disciplines, 243 journals were currently in publication and had a usable email address. Where possible, the direct email of the editor was used in preference to the journal email address. The journal editors were contacted by email with full details of the study (including an explanatory statement) and invited to navigate to a web-based questionnaire (hosted by Survey Methods, Inc. http://www.surveymethods.com/). Of the 243 editors contacted, 90 usable questionnaires were returned giving a response

Table 1 Management related ABS discipline areas (source ABS)

Sub-discipline	Key
Business and Management History	BUS HIST
Business Ethics and Corporate Governance	ETH-GOV
Entrepreneurship and Small Business	ENT-SMBUS
General Management	GEN MAN
Human Resource Management and Employment Studies	HRM&EMP
International Business and Area Studies	IB&AREA
Management Development and Education	MGTDEV&ED
Organization Studies	ORG STUD
Public Sector Management	PUB SEC
Research and Innovation	INNOV
Strategic Management	STRAT
Tourism and Hospitality Management	TOUR-HOSP

rate of 37 %. The distribution of the 90 respondent journals across the four ABS ranks (4 = highest, 1 = lowest) is shown in Table 2.

Instrument

An online survey was administered with 47 items. The first question after entry to the survey (q. 2) asked respondents whether management journals should require declaration and if so when (q. 3) and how (q. 4). The next 23 items (q. 5–27) were attitudinal items (e.g., "Poor quality research will be discouraged by a requirement of declaration") presented with a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Eleven of these 23 items were framed in the negative, i.e., against declaration. The next 13 items (q. 28–40) were questions about their journals current and planned practice. Two questions (q. 41–42) asked the respondent whether completing the survey changed their opinion of whether their journal should require declaration. Four demographic questions were asked (q. 43–46). Additional comments

Table 2 ABS ranking of journals for survey respondents

	Freq.	%
1 = Low	32	34.4
2 = Medium	34	37.8
3 = High	15	16.7
4 = Very high	10	11.1
Total	90	100.0

were requested in q. 47. The survey took approximately 10 min to complete.

Analysis

The results were analyzed using SPSS for Windows (IBM Corporation, NY, USA). Frequency analyses were conducted to determine the proportion of responses for each question. Chi square tests and Fisher's exact test were used to analyze dichotomous data. Spearman's ranked correlation coefficient (r_s) was used for analysis of Likert-scaled items. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

The results presented come from three sources: the survey questionnaire, open-ended comments from the survey, and interviews. A small number of additional comments were gleaned from opinions expressed by editors in email exchanges (arising from the survey) and used with their permission. Findings related to *current and planned practice* derive mainly from the survey, and findings related to *attitudes towards declaration* derive mainly from the survey feedback and the interviews.

Current and Planned Practice

Of the sample 89 % of editors reported that their journals publish papers based on empirical research involving humans. The responses reported in this section on current and planned practice are based on the sub-sample of editors who reported their journals published research involving humans ($n = 77$).

Membership of COPE

A minority (37 %) of journals were members of COPE at the time of the study. Of the members of COPE, an overwhelming majority has been signed up by their publishers (92 %) rather than directly (8 %). Of those who were members of COPE, only just over one-third were aware that COPE has a code of conduct for editors requiring editors to seek declaration (35 %).

Current Practice

Only a minority (17 %) of journals currently require declaration. Of this group ($n = 13$) most require declaration at submission (77 %,) with only one editor requiring declaration as part of the review process and two editors after the review process but before publication. Only 14 % of those requiring declaration also required evidence to substantiate

the declaration (in the form of an ethics committee reference number and contact details).

Planned Practice

Most (71 %) journals do not currently require declaration, and of that group only seven or 11 % plan to introduce a declaration process. For the seven editors who plan to introduce a declaration process, four plan to do it with declaration only, one plans to do it with provision of evidence, and two stated that they were undecided as to how to require declaration.

Attitudes Towards Requirement of Ethics Declaration

The majority of respondents (57 %) answered "no" to the question should business journals require declaration of ethics approval from authors. Of the respondents who provided written open-ended comments in the survey 61 % were against declaration, only 17 % in favor of declaration, and a further 22 % were neutral. None of the characteristics of the editors (gender, age, nationality) or the journals (rank, COPE membership) were found to be associated with attitude towards the question of declaration. However, the responses of the editors to whether they were in favor of declaration ("yes declaration" group) or not in favor of declaration ("no declaration" group) were highly correlated with the specific attitudes toward declaration. The Spearmans' correlations below indicate the degree of polarity between the two groups across the attitudinal variables. For detailed results, please see Table 3.

Reasons in Favor of Declaration

The reasons given in support of declaration appeared to be based on the belief that gaining institutional ethics approval was an accepted and beneficial research practice. Respondents who were in favor of declaration were more likely to agree with the following (see Table 3): that gaining ethics approval is an accepted research norm ($r_s = .84$, $p < .01$); that it is part of the social responsibility of business journals ($r_s = .81$, $p < .01$); that it would result in higher ethical standards for published research ($r_s = .81$, $p < .01$); that it provides assurance for readers ($r_s = .68$, $p < .05$); that it would help protect research participants ($r_s = .68$, $p < .05$); that it would encourage countries/institutions without approval process to introduce one ($r_s = .64$, $p < .05$); that it is part of telling a convincing story about the research ($r_s = .62$, $p < .05$); that poor quality research would be discouraged ($r_s = .60$, $p < .05$); and that journals should not only require declaration but also require evidence of ethics approval ($r_s = .54$, $p < .05$).

Generally, it was accepted by respondents in favor of declaration that ethics committee approval was a necessary step in ensuring ethical integrity—and related protection of research subjects—in research processes and that requirement of declaration was a logical extension of ethics committee approval. For these respondents, the only reasons why management journals would not require declaration were pragmatic: that they had not had time or resources to implement declaration, that it had not been previously expected of management journals, or that the issue of declaration had not been previously raised. On this latter point, a small number of editors stated that they would be considering or introducing declaration as a result of their involvement in this study. Few of the respondents in favor of declaration provided written comments.

Reasons Against Declaration

The reasons for opposing declaration included both pragmatic and philosophical rationale. Respondents against declaration were more likely to agree with (see Table 3): national cultural differences make declaration inappropriate ($r_s = -.70$, $p < .01$) and that it will create publication bias against countries without institutional/university ethics approval processes ($r_s = -.47$, $p < .01$); that declaration would be a disincentive for authors to submit ($r_s = -.67$, $p < .01$); that declaration would be an interference with researchers' methodology ($r_s = -.66$, $p < .01$) and bias "scientific" methodology ($r_s = -.40$, $p < .01$); that research participants are unlikely to be harmed ($r_s = -.62$, $p < .01$); that low-impact research should not need ethics approval in the first place ($r_s = .58$, $p < .01$); that it would place journals in an inappropriate "policing role" ($r_s = -.58$, $p < .01$); that it is unnecessary as ethics approvals are wide spread in business research ($r_s = -.55$, $p < .01$); that it is unlikely for researchers to have conflicts of interest ($r_s = -.55$, $p < .01$); that it will create inappropriate bias towards "scientific" methodology and method ($r_s = -.40$, $p < .01$); that it would be reinforcement of what may be an inappropriate ethics approval process ($r_s = -.40$, $p < .01$); and that journals should address other ethical issues first (e.g., self plagiarism, double submissions) ($r_s = -.24$, $p < .05$).

Opinions against declaration ran the full gamut of the issues already noted and included both philosophical and pragmatic reasons why declaration should not be required by management journals. These editors were concerned about bias against national and cultural differences, reinforcement of specific research methodologies, low risk of harm to individual subjects compared with other unethical behaviors, dangers of bureaucratization and codification, inappropriateness of journal intervention, and the

Table 3 Attitudinal responses towards declaration

Attitudinal variables (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)	Mean ± SD			Correlation between "yes" and "no" (N = 90)
	Total (N = 90)	Declaration "yes" (n = 39)	Declaration "no" (n = 51)	
Gaining ethics approval is an accepted research norm	3.05 ± 1.36	4.36 ± .75	2.04 ± .69	.84**
Top ranked business journals should lead the way	2.95 ± 1.33	4.21 ± .70	2.00 ± .78	.83**
Part of the social responsibility of business journals	2.86 ± 1.32	4.10 ± .79	1.92 ± .72	.81**
Higher ethical standards for the research published in business journals	2.91 ± 1.14	3.84 ± .69	2.12 ± .68	.81**
Help protect the research participants	2.98 ± 1.09	3.81 ± .80	2.34 ± .82	.68**
Removes doubt for the reader about the ethical management of the research	2.86 ± 1.11	3.47 ± .97	2.40 ± .96	.68**
Value outweighs the cost of such a requirement to the journal	2.89 ± 1.18	3.76 ± .78	2.22 ± .99	.66**
Countries/institutions without an ethics approval process would be encouraged to introduce one	2.68 ± 1.12	3.50 ± .95	2.06 ± .79	.64**
Part of telling a convincing story about the research	2.76 ± 1.20	3.60 ± 1.07	2.12 ± .84	.62**
Poor quality research will be discouraged	2.64 ± 1.19	3.44 ± 1.03	2.02 ± .89	.60**
Should not only require declaration but also require evidence of ethics approval	2.17 ± 1.06	2.81 ± 1.06	1.68 ± .76	.54**
National cultural differences make requirement of declaration inappropriate	2.69 ± 1.17	1.78 ± .70	3.38 ± .96	−.70**
Disincentive to authors to submit to a business journal	2.88 ± 1.14	2.13 ± 1.01	3.44 ± .88	−.67**
Interference with researchers' methodology	2.53 ± 1.14	1.68 ± .57	3.16 ± 1.05	−.66**
Low impact and therefore unlikely to harm participants	2.55 ± 1.22	1.71 ± .69	3.18 ± 1.15	−.62**
Low-impact research should not need ethics approval in the first place	2.84 ± 1.29	2.00 ± .86	3.48 ± 1.18	−.58**
Place journals in an inappropriate "policing" role	3.14 ± 1.38	2.23 ± 1.05	3.82 ± 1.20	−.58**
Unnecessary ethics approvals are wide spread in business research	2.67 ± 1.09	2.02 ± .78	3.16 ± 1.03	−.55**
Unlikely for researchers to have conflicts of interest	2.22 ± 1.10	1.55 ± .64	2.72 ± 1.10	−.55**
Create publication bias against countries without institutional/university ethics approval processes	3.15 ± 1.15	2.52 ± 1.00	3.62 ± 1.02	−.47**
Inappropriate bias towards "scientific" methodology and method	2.72 ± 1.09	2.23 ± .88	3.08 ± 1.10	−.40**
Reinforcement of what may be an inappropriate ethics approval process	3.08 ± 1.10	2.60 ± .85	3.44 ± 1.12	−.40**
Should address other ethical issues first (e.g., self plagiarism, double submissions)	3.63 ± 1.10	3.31 ± 1.16	3.86 ± .98	−.24*

** p < .01, * p < .05

importance of allowing author autonomy and placing trust in authors. Most of the written comments provided by respondents were against declaration.

Declaration, indeed ethics committee approval generally was seen as potentially shifting power and control over the research process away from the researcher to both institutional bodies and research participants. For these respondents, the potential problems of declaration outweighed concerns about possibility of supporting unethical research.

> I am more worried that the research ethics process puts some people into a powerful gatekeeper role (and who controls them) than I am about the dangers of unethical research. (Participant 23)

Some respondents suggested that declaration and ethics committee approval processes actually cause unethical research.

> …ethics committees tend to be rule bound and impose restrictions that are unethical, and are in danger of generating unethical research by requiring the researcher to place an emphasis on the wishes of the informant, even when the informant has been found to be engaged in less than ethical behaviour. (Participant 13).

Skepticism was expressed as to the likelihood that declaration and the ethics committee approval process would in

fact ensure ethical behavior. Emphasis was given by respondents to the need for researcher independence and responsibility.

> I think that ethics and morality are matters for individuals that should be informed by discursive practices, not enforced and policed by agencies that can only construct processes that are more about 'tick box' compliance and formalised pseudo-accountability than they are about fundamental ethical problems and issues. (Participant 32)

The ethical significance of the purpose of business research was highlighted.

> I believe that the academy should be encouraging business researchers to be addressing how their research makes a difference to the quality of people's lives, and is addressing some of the major and thorny problems we have in the world, rather than getting potentially more internally focused. (Participant 35)

Ethics and Impact of This Research on the Individual and Collective Subject

I have approached this research with heightened awareness of the ethical considerations for the project and thus incorporate these reflexively into the study. To begin with, I ensured that details of procedures used for the management of the ethical treatment of the participating subjects of this research were approved by an institutional ethics committee and provided in detail to the research participants, journal editors, reviewers, and readers. By virtue of this study's conventional research method, low-impact research, and non-vulnerable subjects, I experienced no delay or difficulty in obtaining ethics committee approval. As such, I experienced little of the discomfort felt by many qualitative researchers.

In line with my methodology, I believed it is essential to consider the influence of my research on the collective subject, that is, give ethical consideration to the social and practical implications of the my research. At a basic level, the survey included a question asking the respondents whether as a result of being involved in this study they had changed their opinion. Although only 19 % of respondents said their opinion had changed following completion of the survey, of these respondents all but one (94 %) reported they were more convinced that their journal should require declaration. However, at a broader level, the possibility that this study will challenge and advance debate in management scholarship on the topic of publication ethics will be a more significant acquittal of ethical responsibility to the collective subject.

Discussion

Despite the fact that more than one-third of journals in the sample were signed up to the COPE agreement that requires journal editors to seek assurance of declaration, a considerably fewer number of journals actual required or planned to require declaration. It is apparent from the findings that there is significant divergence among the responses from management journal editors to the question of whether management journals should require declaration of institutional ethics approval from submitting authors. Generally, those in favor of declaration invoked the rationale that the implementation of rules was likely to enhance both the perceived and actual ethical treatment of research subjects. In contrast, those against declaration were concerned that the potential negative consequences would outweigh any benefit. To some extent we may see this as a divergence between deontological and consequentialist thinking, but the complexities raised by the involvement of multiple actors, in particular the idea of the collective subject, suggests that a more relational based analysis would add deeper understanding of both the phenomenon and responses to it.

Opinions held by editors in favor of declaration were based on perceived "good practice." Gaining ethics committee ethics approval was seen as a research norm, and declaration of such approval was seen as part of the social responsibility of journals, particularly for leading journals. Declaration was perceived as enhancing ethical standards and quality of research that would provide surety for both journal readers and research participants. Any concerns about costs were outweighed by the gained value of requiring declaration. This "good practice" rationale is consistent much of the rationale behind the establishment and practice of ethics committees: that institutionally imposed standards and guidelines provide for assurance of ethical research outcomes.

In contrast, editors who were against declaration expressed beliefs that codification of ethical behavior would have a negative effect on ethical research outcomes and, in addition, would undermine researcher autonomy and creativity. Declaration was seen as a further reinforcement of narrow and homogenizing institutional processes that reinforced positivist research methods and methodologies and the expense of alternative paradigms. These arguments against codified rules might explain some editors' own actions with regard to not implementing declaration requirements despite their journals belonging to COPE. Ethical implications of management research go well beyond the protection of research participants (who may not even need protection). As noted earlier, management research holds significant ethical implications for not only the participant subjects but also the collective subject

implicated by the research. Furthermore, it was believed that declaration would place editors and journals in an inappropriate policing role that would mitigate the natural moral responsibility and professional autonomy of the authors. These editors were not suggesting that research ethics were not important: rather that protection of participant subjects through declaration was not the best way to achieve ethical research.

In considering the qualitative comments made by the editors, there is a strong indication that both protection of the research participant *and* the autonomy of the research/er are highly valued by management journal editors. Declaration as a tick-box exercise tends to polarize these two goals such that they are positioned as opposites. By claiming to "do the moral thinking for others," we risk undermining the moral autonomy of those working for our organizations and institutions (Bauman 1993; ten Bos 1997, p. 997). This does not need to be the case; ethical guidelines do not necessarily have to undermine researcher autonomy and responsibility. Rather than being invoked as prescriptions for control and discipline, ethics codes should be used "to encourage the formulation and interpretation of ethical principles, such as reciprocity, which define the relationship between the researcher and the society being studied in a way that draws attention to its moral aspect" (Bell and Bryman 2007).

Accordingly it is suggested that, although consideration of research participants in management research should be a research norm, this consideration should not necessarily overtake other ethical concerns and should not be undertaken in a codified one-size-fits-all manner. We do not need to pre-determine either the correct way the research subject should be treated or the manner in which it is reported. The researcher should provide the information necessary for the editor, reviewer, reader, and the research "subject" to be able to make a judgment as to the ethical considerations given to research subjects. Importantly, consideration should be given to both the participant subject and the collective subject.

There are precedents for the provision of nuanced information in published management research. Irrespective of methodological stance, most scholars would expect an empirical paper to include some description of the method undertaken by the researcher to ensure the quality of the findings. The manner in which this information is provided may be circumscribed but may also be quite organic. It is proposed that this same expectation should be extended to the ethical integrity of the research. A reader, reviewer, editor, or journal should not accept silence on the question of the ethical treatment of the very subject/s of the research. Researchers should provide this information in a manner that is meaningful to themselves and other parties to the research, and that is consistent with their

methodology. Management journals have significant influence over scholarly research. Through their mandate, editorial decision-making, and review processes, journals can inculcate ethical considerations as central to the research endeavor.

The example provided in this current paper is that of a straight forward declaration placed in the method section together with embedded reflexivity regarding the ethical treatment of the individual and ethical subject discussed throughout the paper. This can be contrasted with more participatory research (also action research, co-operative inquiry, etc.), where the focus, methodology, findings, recommendations, implementation, assessment, and dissemination are negotiated between researchers and participants, which would require a deeper and more nuanced explanation regarding ethical considerations. An embedded organic approach would allow such researchers to report their ethical considerations toward the co-researchers (i.e., the research participants) within their discussion of the research findings alongside their personal reflections as researchers (see for example Hidegh and Csillag 2013, pp. 30–31).

Drawing from Tolich and Fitzgerald (2006), it is suggested that at a minimum researchers should address three fundamental questions as part of their research reports: (1) What is the research project about including what is the involvement of human participants (the individual subject) and what is the purpose of the paper (the collective subject)? (2) What ethical issues does the researcher believe are raised by this project (for the individual and collective subject)? and (3) How does the researcher address these ethical problems? Furthermore, authors, reviewers, and editors should consider reporting of ethical considerations as an essential element of any manuscript based on human subject research, and therefore should seek, comment, and develop the manner in which these considerations are reported. Reviewing for ethical integrity of research comprises one aspect of our responsibilities as scholars. PhD students and early career scholars are commonly educated about expectations of them as authors and reviewers, often through PhD research training and other professional development both at research institutions and through scholarly associations (such as the Academy of Management). Along with other guidance, we should provide direction for the substantive consideration of a broad range of ethical issues in management research in these roles (see Bedeian et al. 2010).

As management scholars, we should take our ethical responsibility to our research subjects seriously. Beyond treating "ethics as hurdle" through satisfying ethics committees' protocols and safeguarding participants (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008, p. 1524), we are responsible for the ethical nature of our research and how our research impacts our communities (Freeman 2002). In the words of Aldred

(2008, p. 894), by involving ourselves with organizational entities, we take on responsibilities toward those affected by the organization (positively and negatively) that is to enact "ethics as seeking out silences" (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008, p. 1528). Further, we have the opportunity to explicitly engage research participants in the planning and execution of our research, a form of reciprocity which allows researcher and researched to recognize and relate to each other as moral beings (Bell and Bryman 2007) and thereby treat "ethics as central warrant for research" (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008, p. 1532). We should write these ethics and ethical relationships into our research as declaration of our own moral commitments for all to read.

Conclusion and Implications

From the outset it was apparent that requirement of declaration—rather than being a minor, benign, disconnected practice—is deeply embedded in the social construction of knowledge in our academic discipline. Whilst much attention is placed on the position of editors, reviewers, and authors in management research publication, sparse focus has been on the research subject. Specifically, ethical issues surrounding the research subject, either in the guise of the individual participant subject or the collective subject of the research, are rarely at the forefront of debate on quality and integrity of management research and research publications. Requirement for declaration, like the ethics committee practices it reflects, is in keeping with the spread of natural science procedures to the social sciences (Bamber and Sappey 2007). In the same way that ethics committees may create institutional advantage for quantitative positivist research over qualitative and constructivist research within universities (Halse and Honey 2005; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006), requirement for declaration may privilege particular research types over others. Furthermore, requirement of declaration is one more step in "ethics creep" (Haggerty 2004), one more bureaucratic ethical endeavor that is more likely to suppress rather than encourage real moral intuition and actions (Bauman 1993). Research ethics protocols tend to focus on minimizing harm and risk taking, rather than creating benefit or justice (Haggerty 2004; Tolich and Fitzgerald 2006; Bell and Bryman 2007). If we really desire to make ethics the "central warrant" of our research (Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008), it seems unlikely that requirement of author declaration will assist.

A flexible, nuanced approach to ethical expectations of management research is more likely to account for the various methodological approaches and specific conditions of this research. Ethical considerations of management research should be embedded throughout the research process and should be written into any publications arising. Editors, reviewers, readers, and research participants should expect to read the details as part of the convincing research story. In the same way that researchers are expected to account of various aspects of method, which encompass research credibility and generalizability, detail of which is considered essential for publication, researchers should account for ethical considerations. Management academic institutions and journals should embed this expectation into policies and practices, and editors, reviewers, and readers should be educated to this effect. In conclusion, whilst the argument formed in this paper does not support author declaration in the form of ethics committee approval, it does support author declaration of research ethics as an organic, embedded ingredient of the research narrative.

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