



**IMPACT  
2017**

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**Investigating market research ethics:  
An empirical study of codes of ethics in  
practice and their effect on ethical  
behaviour**

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## Presentation Overview

Rationale for research  
What do we know so far?  
Research questions  
Methodology  
Research findings  
What next?

# Future-Fit: Strategies for better business and society

- Place of ethics
- Better and *ethical* business environment and society
- Changing technologies and environments
- Recent developments in market research: use of big data, emerging research methodologies
- Increasing pressure to apply standards and guidelines to ensure ethical behaviour
- Ethics codes in market research: ESOMAR, MRS, AAPOR, MRSNZ (currently RANZ)

# Rationale for research

- Core assumption: codes of ethics act as a mechanism facilitating and ensuring ethical behaviours within organisations and industries.
  - BUT do codes influence ethical decision-making?
  - Focus on client relationships (i.e. micro-level of ethics)
  - Less descriptive studies (more normative / prescriptive)
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- Exploring practitioners' perceptions of ethics codes' role in ethical decision-making.

# What do we know so far?

## 1. Industry/ Organisational level:

- Codes are designed with the intent to guide behaviour
- *No agreement* as to how useful and effective codes are
- *Affiliation* to professional bodies transfers attributes to a person or organisation; better business transactions, impersonal trust, credibility, positive reputation.
- *Organisation's size* – relevant aspect in the option to develop and use codes of ethics.

## 2. Individual / Practitioner level:

- Codes – important tool in shaping ethical perceptions and judgements
- To increase *moral awareness* and ethical behaviour, the use and enforcement of codes is necessary
- Aware of codes but not *familiar* with content and how to *interpret* them.

## 3. Practitioner-Client relationship level:

- *Interpersonal trust* generates good business relationships
- Role of codes in generating trust – mixed results
- *Personal values* and openness
- *Interpersonal / individual factors* rather than organisational factors are more predictive of trust

# Research questions

1. What variables (e.g. codes, size of organisation, affiliation to a professional body) may potentially have an impact on client relationships?
2. How do practitioners perceive and interpret ethics codes as affecting their behaviour at work?
3. What is the role of codes in ethical decision-making in market researcher-client relationships?

# Research methodology

- Inductive qualitative research
- Interpretive design
- 29 in-depth semi-structured interviews
- Purposeful sampling (specific roles and experience, good representation of small and medium-sized organisations, both members and non-members of MRSNZ)
- Collection of data: March 2007-June 2008
- Thematic analysis of 370 single-spaced pages of transcripts finalised 2011
- First-order and second-order interpretations

# Key research findings

- Codes – do not appear to have a significant effect on ethical behaviour:
  - Aware, but limited familiarity with the code's content
  - Limited reinforcement of codes and on-going training on ethics
  - Code – hygiene factor, reinforcer of personal values and beliefs
- Affiliation to a professional body (MRSNZ): 'seal of approval' but does not create a significant advantage in client relations

*"Membership has certain criteria but it doesn't guarantee anything at the end of it. It doesn't say that just because you're a member of MRSNZ, you are a market researcher of good standing and your experience is at this level ... [Trust] is built on your **ability to do the job** and the trust that you are going to do it well. [Trust] is your ability to deliver **quality work**."*

- No differences among large, medium and small organisations
- Consultation with peers

# Key research findings (contd)

- At the foundation of practitioners' decisions lay personal ethics and values; common sense

*"At the end of the day I think personally I would always follow my own moral values."*

*"If you have strong values I think that's your code of ethics."*

*"It's usually a common-sense issue. No, I'd have to say I don't [refer to the code]... I mean, I just fix it ... I use personal ethics."*

- Trust – essential!

*"[Trust] is crucial ... New Zealand is small ... I think it constrains people to be well behaved. It's like being in a village... As soon as someone behaves unethically people do know about it."*

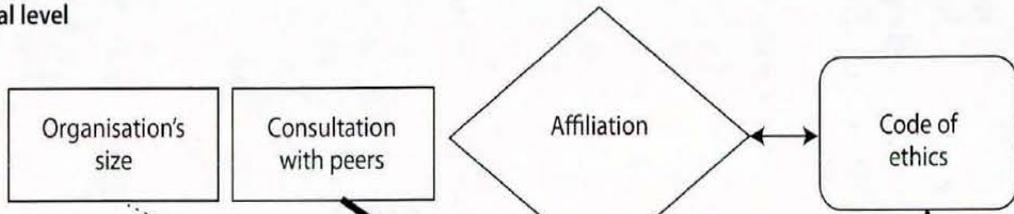
- Impersonal and **personal trust**: credibility and reputation;

*"I think it really comes down to the individual person as opposed to the organisation because this is where we've either followed a client from organisation to organisation or we've been with the organisation and had the key person change. That level of trust really seems to reside with the individual as opposed to the organisation."*

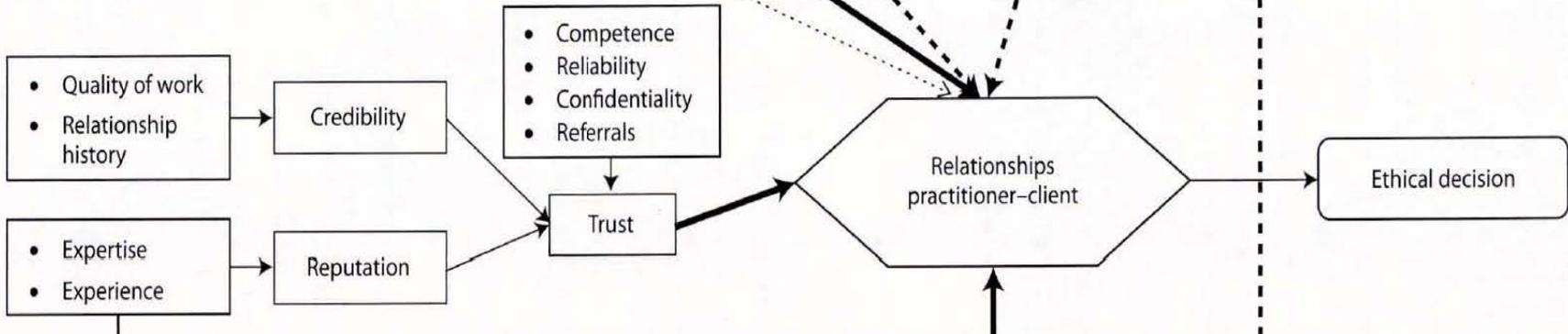
*"People talk, individuals get reputations - [a company's reputation] is only possible through individuals' reputations, which are cemented in the fact that in their original client relationships they delivered a high level of value."*

- Protecting and maintaining confidentiality involving sensitive client information

Industry/organisational level



Relationships level



Individual/practitioner level

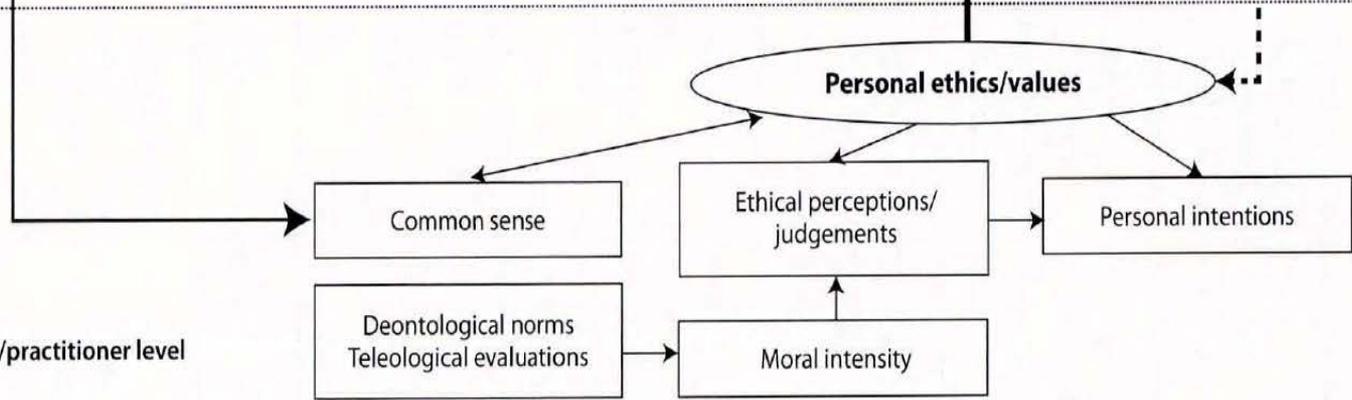


Figure 1 Factors influencing ethical decision-making in practitioner-client relationships

# What next?

- More resources are placed into ethics and awareness of codes
- Recent literature continues to question the impact codes of ethics have on ethical decision-making (see Holder-Webb & Cohen, 2012; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2016; Kleynjans & Hudon, 2016; Romani & Szkudlarek, 2014)
- On-going debate on whether or not an increased awareness of the code does, in fact, positively influence moral judgment, intent, and behaviour (see Statler & Oliver, 2016)
- More empirical and theoretical work needed in international contexts to understand the role of codes in ethical-decision making.



**Thank you!  
Any Questions?**

**What are your experiences?**

