

Investigating Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Project Managers and the Implementation of Ethical Standards and Codes of Conduct in Project Management Practice

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ABSTRACT

Ethical decision-making is a critical competency for project managers, who often face challenging situations with potential conflicts between project goals and ethical principles. This pilot study explores the frequency of ethical dilemmas encountered by project managers and the perceived impact of ethical standards and codes of conduct. A quantitative survey was distributed to project managers, gathering data on the frequency of various ethical dilemmas and their perspectives on the influence of ethical frameworks. Thematic analysis will be conducted on interview and VR simulation data (not presented here) to gain deeper insights into project managers' experiences with ethical decision-making. This study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the ethical landscape faced by project managers and identify potential areas where ethical decision-making support can be enhanced.

Keywords: Ethical decision-making, Project management, Ethical dilemmas, Decision-making framework, Ethical leadership, Organizational culture.

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INTRODUCTION

With the project management profession being firmly entrenched in the modern world, the project manager not only choreographs the complex movements of resources, timelines and quality in the era of project management but also oversees the successful implementation of projects across all industries (Project Management Institute, 2017). Nonetheless, on the job sometimes they are exposed to ethically unfavorable conditions by their unrelenting desire of attaining business goals. Nevertheless, these issues place them in the situations of ethics that require them to find the way in which the values of human lives should be weighted against the projects objectives. The project managers encounter and puts forward the implementation models for ethical regulations and code of conduct in project management. The rising intricacy of projects as well as unpredictable changeable business atmosphere require a greater level of comprehension of the ethical terrain that project managers cross. The proposed research identifies and analyzes the current ethical difficulties as well as critically assessing the performance of



available ethical standards and codes of conduct of project management. This is done to contribute to the formulation of strong ethical standards and specific code of conduct exclusively designed for project management practice. Project managers function in a constantly changing and at times extremely tight-constrained atmosphere. In addition to the tight timeframes, resources, and unpredictable expectation of the stakeholders, professional ethics issues may arise. Mastering these ethical clashes plays a key role in discovering good answers. Project managers in many cases have to deal with an unreasonable bias towards completing the project in a very short time. Such pressures may result in ethical compromises, including, for instance, an impression on quality level or various shortcuts (Turner & Müller, 2005). In similar circumstances, a project manager of a critical infrastructure project might face the pressure of accelerated construction deadlines that might then compromise certain safety procedures. He may sometimes find themselves facing a scenario where their own or particular parties interests conflict with the overall mission of the project (Rahman et al. , 2018). The problem can happen when a manager who is also directly involved in a project evaluation has a financial interest in the goods supplier being hired for the project. Weighting a decision toward one's own benefit would in turn affect the project's success, and such would be counterproductive to ethical practice. As it is, a project with poorly defined goals and objects might be a source of concern and ethical problems when it comes to making decisions on matters involving resource load and project deliverable (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). As the shortage of resources may make the project managers trying to make challenging choices, the result can be the ethical decision-making. The marketing project manager who has to delivers the campaign with limited resources will have to prioritize certain marketing channels over others, which can affect the inclusivity and reach of the campaign thus indirectly affecting the success rate of the marketing level (Crawford et al., 2017). The technologies that have made a great deal of progress recently, such as artificial intelligence or bio technologies, dramatically change the paradigm of ethics for project manager's, making them deal with the issues of privacy, bias in algorithms, and ethical questions associated with the implementation of those technologies (Verbraeck et al., 2020). Human being project leaders can be confronted with ethical issues while being responsible for either the design or implementation of AI tools, as they can suffer from algorithm biases or they might face the consequences of automation. These are just a few of all problems which pent up of project manager. The unique attributes of these issues clearly emphasize the importance of developed ethical norms and the creation of ethical codes of conduct in the practice of Project management.

Ethical frameworks and entity codes of conduct offer project manages with a structure approach to the complexities of the ethicality pitfalls. Ethical Frameworks: These frameworks rely heavily on well-established ethical theories, supplanting utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics, among others, on which to base their decision-making processes. To put things simply, utilitarianism revolves around the notion of the greater good of policies that can bring happiness to all. Enacting this structure, managers could analyze the situation through the ethical lens in order to keep other parties interested in the making of decisions. Virtue ethics are concentrated on the acquisition and realization of such qualities as honorableness, daring, and faithfulness. In project management, the virtues of spatial judgment, perseverance, and resilience, when nurtured, will direct ethical choices throughout the project. Ethic codes is the implementing of the ethical principles into the concrete guidelines of professional behaviour applicable within a specific corporation, internal, or industry. The same bodies that the project management professionals belong may constitute themselves as embracing ethical codes of conduct that outline what a professional is required to do. Such rules are frequently formulated so as to achieve the objectives like honesty, fairness, competence, and confidentiality. The ethical framework employ will probably be vague and open to different interpretation for real-world scenarios. Project managers may experience a dilemma of how to implement general concepts to the concrete actions when facing with the ethical dilemmas in the real world environment (Gardiner & Kenny, 2017).



The very nature of the project management environment calls for evaluating and providing necessary updates to the codes of conduct to remain current and to provide ethics guideline on the prevailing emerging ethical issues. The deficiencies of these documents emphasize the need for additional research that focuses on creating updated, concrete ethical frameworks and codes of conduct that are representative and for the project management industry. The research will systematically review the literature and analyze in-depth case studies to identify current project manager's most dominant ethical problems in a difficult project environment. Emphasizing real-world problems is a key point as therefore it will give the developed models and ethical codes a practical application to the project management practice. Employing case studies and VR simulations, the study will find out how decision-making related to managing the ethical dilemmas is done by project managers in real life. In-depth examination of these decision-making mechanisms, in particular, would help unravel the elements that shape ethical choices of project leaders. The study will critically and testingly assess the ethical frameworks and codes of conduct in operation in project management at this time. This evaluation process will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the influence of ethics on effective project management, which will in turn contribute to more practicable and specific recommendations for project managers facing ethical challenges. The ethics frameworks and codes of conduct is the bare minimum; it should be accompanied by a multidimensional approach. There are two very important factors having an impact on ethical decision-making, they are: stakeholders and organizational culture. People in the Stakeholder Group which consist of clients, sponsors, team members and so on might be strong pressurizers on Project Managers. Stakeholder analysis and effective communication networks are basics for successful decisions in moral challenges (Ghaziani & Rezaee, 2015). One of the primary objectives of the research is to educate the stakeholders about ethical principles and why it is necessary to follow ethical project management in order to have a collaborative approach to resolving ethical challenges. Organizational culture is another one of the factors which play an essential part in the development of ethical behavior. A robust ethical culture should be the first priority for the project manager. Leadership should uphold an ethical conduct, transparency, and the accountability culture (Hobgood et al., 2015). The research seeks to discover how organizational culture can be used as a tool necessary to facilitate ethical behavior from project management teams.

Background

The management of projects is one of key factors that influence the executions of the various types of endeavors across different industries (Duncan, 2017). Successful project managers work on a schedule, align budget with appropriate financial resources, and achieve the required standard of quality (Project Management Institute, 2017). The ethics of attaining these goals often come up as a tough nut to crack. Project managers frequently engage in conflict resolution processes that involve clashing objectives, scarce availability of resources, and needs of the stakeholders (Ghaziani & Rezaee, 2015). Research shows project managers deal with a variety of ethical issues constantly. Such issues may include working to unrealistic deadlines which will impact quality negatively (Turner & Müller, 2005), handling conflicts of interest with stakeholders (Rahman et al., 2018), working with an unclear project scope (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007) and working with a limited amount of resources (Crawford, Amabile, & V The development of the technologies like artificial intelligence and biotechnologies makes it difficult to apply ethical principles since the managers will have to deal with new considerations (See Verbraeck et al., 2020). Although the field of ethical decision-making in project management has been covered in previous studies (e.g., Gardiner & Kenny, 2017; Treviño & Weaver, 1995), a more thorough understanding of the exact challenges which project managers nowadays face has become prevalent. Current methodology is usually based on scientific surveys and questionnaires (Hobgood et al., 2015). This study intends to fill these knowledge gaps attaining a multi-stage approach. By using a sequential

mixed methods design methodology, it combines these two well-established methods: a literature scoping and brief survey with a more novel approach: a VR simulation. This holistic method attempts to provide the needed cognitive frame to better understand the ethical bumps project managers may encounter and how they tackle these problem in a life-like decision-making environment. Determining the most common ethical pitfalls where project managers encounter them in present times. Elizabeth provides an insight into the process of ethical decision making that managers face while dealing with ethical dilemma. The consideration of the VR simulations potential in educational methods utilized to train ethical decisions of project managers. The findings of this project will possibly provide improvement for academicians and practitioners in this area. By pinpointing the intricacy of ethical issues which Chartered Project Managers often face, the study can potentially be used for the creation of new training programs and ethical structures for making their decisions.

Objective

- Identify and categorize the ethical dilemmas faced by project managers throughout the project lifecycle.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing ethical frameworks and codes of conduct in project management.
- Develop a practical five-step ethical decision-making framework for project managers, considering project complexity, stakeholder interests, resource limitations, and compliance regulations.
- Investigate the influence of project manager experience on the types and frequency of ethical dilemmas encountered.
- Analyze the impact of organizational culture on ethical decision-making in project management.
- Recommend training programs and resources to enhance project managers' ethical decision-making capabilities.
- Propose strategies for cultivating a strong ethical culture within organizations that support ethical behavior throughout project lifecycles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical decision-making is a cornerstone of successful project management. Project managers routinely face situations with competing values or ambiguous guidelines, necessitating frameworks to navigate these complexities (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2017). This review examines prominent frameworks, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and how your proposed model addresses existing limitations.

Comparison of Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks in Project Management

Several frameworks guide ethical decision-making in project management.

Table 1: Comparison of Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks in Project Management

Framework	Strengths	Weaknesses
PMI Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF)	- Straightforward 5-step process - Aligns with PMI's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (PMI, 2017)	- Lacks industry-specific guidance - Limited discussion of potential decision consequences

Velasquez's Six-Step Moral Problem-Solving Model	- Comprehensive approach considering stakeholders and consequences (Velasquez, 2006) - Encourages principle-based reasoning	- Can be time-consuming to implement (Velasquez, 2006) - Requires significant ethical reasoning skills
National Business Ethics Quiz (NBEQ)	- Focuses on self-awareness and ethical sensitivity (Trevino & Nelson, 2011) - Useful for identifying personal ethical biases	- Limited to individual decision-making, doesn't address project context (Trevino & Nelson, 2011)

Addressing the Gaps: How Your Proposed Model Strengthens Ethical Decision-Making

Existing frameworks offer valuable guidance, but limitations exist. Your proposed model can address these gaps:

- **Industry Specificity:** Consider incorporating modules or prompts that tailor the decision-making process to specific project sectors like construction, engineering, IT.
- **Practical Guidance:** Your model can extend beyond a general framework by offering practical tools and resources for project managers. This could include decision trees, case studies, or scenario-based training modules.
- **Consequence Analysis:** The model can emphasize the importance of considering potential consequences of ethical decisions on stakeholders, project outcomes, and organizational reputation.

By integrating these elements, your proposed model equips project managers with a more comprehensive and practical approach to ethical decision-making throughout the project life cycle.

Background Theory

Ethical Decision-Making Theories provide information about how individuals think and whether they choose the moral choice, even in dilemmatic situations. Relevant theories for this research include: Utilitarianism principle stresses the point that on the basis of maximizing overall utility or happiness, the best way to do things is the one that benefits the majority of the population (Mill, 1863). In project management, this is translated to the consideration of a number of the ethical issues which include the decisions that are made to affect all the stakeholders. Deontological Ethics namely deals with the compliance with moral rules and the adherence to the universality, irrespective of the consequences, emotions and preferences (Kant, 1785). A project manager may appreciate this model by promoting among the people involved in the project, ethical principles the likes of integrity and fairness in spite of high pressure. Virtue Ethics then calls for the cultivation and the implementation of these virtues which make up integrity, courage, and trustworthiness (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics). The management of ethical project would come in handy of this project management, and the way in which these virtues can be understood will help with the making the suitable decision during the project's sensing time.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development theory, one undergoes moral reasoning, and the egoism, then way too generalized are the principles of justice an then final stage. PMs with the morally developed stages are likely to enact morally correct choices. Rest's Sociomoral Maturity Model focus on moral judgment, moral sensitivity, as well as moral motivation in this framework emphasize the key factors in making ethical decisions (Rest, 1986). Project managers who are morally-sensitive, strengthened about ethical issues in projects, will be more in tune with them.



These theories on ethical judgment and moral development will be paired with the research on project management to create a comprehensive framework for project managers to use in making ethical choices. In the investigation, there will be endeavor to know the theory which mostly does meet cross-section of the decision-making processes shown in the case studies and VR simulations. Also, the research will focus on how project managers' personality, including moral reasoning stage or nurturing ethical conscience, could be a determinant factor in decision-making while navigating through the ethical dilemmas that may have a career impact on project management. By employing these theoretical models alongside the quantitative data gathered, the research ultimately seeks to provide a more complete picture of the variables involved in the project managers' ethical decision making.

Previous Studies

There is a burgeoning level of interest on the part of researchers over the last decade on the moral aspect of decision-making in project management. Some studies considered the ethics dilemmas that project managers face and the factors that are affecting the approach or the action they will take. A number of ethical decisions, found in research, are faced by project managers. There is a clear and unequivocal trade-off on prioritizing time over quality (Turner and Müller, 2005). The conflict of interests are the main concern in the management of projects as personal gain or the interests of the different stakeholders may not coincide with a project's aims (Rahman et al., 2018). As Shenhar and Dvir (2007) ponder over this projects management ethical difficulties, they consider the organizational confusions that arise from the lack of a clearly defined project scope and that can lead to unexpected ethical conflicts when managing resources and delivering their project results to the target beneficiaries. Furthermore, ethical considerations of resource shortages, Crawford et al. (2017) state, make resource allocation decisions a problem for project managers to make decisions that could involve ethics. Certain facets have been postulated as the ones to which the ethical decision making of the project managers is attributed to. The authors Gardiner and Kenny (2017), the tittle-role of the ethical frameworks and codes of conduct is creating such that are relevant to a particular project and used to face ethical dilemmas in a structured manner. Treviño and Weaver (1995) emphasize the impact of personal ethical values and moral reasoning of project manager on his / her management through a given decision-making process. Hogood et al. (2015) discovered that ethical decisions made by project managers are influenced by the organizational culture, such as ethical dilemmas. The last point is a high importance of the stakeholders involvement in making the right decisions, for example, clients or sponsors. The existing researches are useful in that they provide a good basis for the future study of ethics in project management, but there are still some gaps in our understanding of ethics in project management. Even though new technologies, for example, artificial intelligence and biotechnologies, have a tendency to modify the policy making in project management, the ethics of such decisions have not yet thoroughly been examined. Need for Rigorous Research Methods: presently, it disadvantages existing research to rely on data which has been obtained through self-reported or case studies. There is the urgency of employing broader scientific investigation tools to identify more deeply the complex interrelationships which are the basis of these decision-making processes.

VR simulation will take us through the process of tug of war between the project manager and the ongoing ethical dilemma created by this novel technology. Through my proposed approach, which includes the method of systematic literature review, the use of extensive case studies and a VR simulation, I hope to provide a deep comprehension of PM decision-making processes. Achieving such an aim would require to fill the gaps that exist in this field of research and thus contribute greatly to the body of knowledge on ethical decision-making on projects by managers.



Conceptual Framework

This framework is a step that outlines how unethical standards need to be incorporated right from the project management. The first stage integrates the project life cycles into phase recognition. The range of ethical challenges can change as they go through the stages of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling plus closing the project. In facing these challenges, the next section brings about ethical risk assessment framework as a solution. Herein, team leaders are able to address these issues prior to them becoming significant barriers to project success, such as incorrect definition of project scope or disagreements among stakeholders, availability of resources, or compliance with ethics and regulations. Similarly, if ethical issues are detected, there are useful precepts that an ethical decision-making framework can provide the project manager with, for navigating conflicts. This model takes a 5-fold approach. However, you can optionally modify this step and create your own approach depending on your long-term goal. Primarily, the project managers unravel various ethical concerns, considering the ethical implications of particular action options and potential outcomes. First of all, they get details through conversing with the stakeholders, the ethical codes, and the practical directives. Finally thirdly the framework shows that alternative approaches are researched, and the framework is not written that a strong ethical culture within the organization is essential for a good success implementation. Hence, the idea of cultivating an ethical atmosphere is the next important link in the process. This is accomplished through a combination of behavioral change programs that involves training and awareness which in turn positively influence the skills of ethical decision making and the knowledge on existing frameworks. Furthermore, the senior officials must show an aggressive approach to introducing an Ethical Behavior, thus establishing a framework for ethical conduct purposes for all employees. In addition to the manager communication channels that are made available, managers now have a safe place to share their worries without any fear. Additionally, an appraisal and rewards scheme is crafted to the processes of identify and encourage ethical behavior at the team project. The last step defines the most important thing: the necessity of permanently ongoing improvement. Now pilot testing of the model takes place with the management to get their opinions and made possible to improve the effect of the model in real practice. Underlying this framework are three key assumptions: the resolution of ethical issues ahead of time gives rise to better decisions; the establishment of the ethical problem-solving approach builds up a skill set to handle complex ethical issues among managers; and the culture within an organization educates all on ethical behavior which in turn improves how people behave ethically on project teams. Through this proven framework project leaders are able to make sound decisions that are right, considering organization mission, ethical principles which in turn lead to a success of a project. trying to be simultaneously involved into problem-solving techniques, as well as the ethical aspects and finalizing tasks. The next step involves the assessment of these consequences through the identification of the risks and benefits for all the stakeholders, project results and reputation of the organization. Now, they utilize the gained knowledge and make a choice that is the most moral.

METHODOLOGY

The approach, however brilliant, is coupled with numerous methods that go beyond the type of traditional research design that most management experts are aware of. We set a higher bar than ordinary academic resources (Tranfield et al., 2020) by going beyond research reports (Smith et al., 2020), practice forums (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007), and even anonymous whistleblower platforms (Near & Miceli, 2015) to gain a deep and wide view of ethics in project management. Through the application of modern text mining methodologies such as, those developed by (Sebastiani, 2002) we expose what may seem hidden trends and relationships in an immense amount of textual information. One of the research methodologies that will be used, under the theory of network analysis by Newman (2018),



involves identifying the themes that are dominant, the emerging trends, and the clusters of interconnected ethical predicaments. This can be regarded as a visual map of the ethical environment, where the nodes symbolize either ethical obstacles, and the edges refer their mutuality. A panel with high expertise is formed, composed of self-confident project managers, ethicists, and legal professionals who update each other's inputs in a multi-stage Delphi rounds based on Boulkedjian et al. model. It performs an anonymized forum where the ideas accompanied by the most urgent ethical challenges encountered in project management start to come to the ground.

We subjectively choose a reliable mixture of project case studies that is not only limited to the frequent but very complex situations, including ethically precarious cases, which are studied with purposive sampling (Patton, 2022). Try making a project utilizing systems that have the capability of becoming autonomous weapons (Lin et al., 2023) or one that poses an ethical dilemma with the type of culture that is dominant in a place that is far away and being at war, like the case of (Dana, 2013). **Ethnographic Immersion:** Researchers will also not be just interviewing parties on the surface-level, they will be immersed or studying human behavior in project teams incorporating the concept of ethnography advocated for by Pink (2015). This will be attending to interchanges, rehearsing the ethical pressures directly at the location and capturing the ethical details of tangled trench decisions for the project. The investigation is focused on the digital setting, which is where many project efforts take place. This is done by analyzing the project management software logs, the internal communication channels (eg. Slack, email), as well as social media interactions (Hinds et al., 2018), in order to uncover hidden cross-cultural conflicts and ethical issues that might otherwise not be apparent in ordinary interviews. We create a virtual reality (VR) situation based on Bowman & McMahan (2007) that knits project managers in situations, although controlled, that they might face on the job where they must decide on hard choices on a short notice. We will be identifying physiological data, as in Fairclough's study (2013), so that we can understand better the role of emotions and the cognitive processes in ethical decision-making among project managers. The VR testing with project managers' groups will continue so that the instruction can be repeatedly brought to a higher level through iterations that will make it as real as possible and effective for the problem-solving of the ethical questions based on ethics principles (Sharp et al., 2019).

Focus Groups for Debriefing and Ethical Reflection: After VR showcase, PMs will be divided into groups with an emphasis trainer from teaching ethics. Such an approach exploits Krueger & Casey's (2014) that allows deep contemplation of their decision making mechanisms and queries the ethics of their choices in VR environment. This research method has a wider purview than the hypothesis checking in the traditional approaches. It combines the spirit of discovery that goes beyond the traditional and extends to the realm of exploring new ethical approaches to unravel the complex ethical maze that challenges the PM role with. This kind of research will use a mix of methods, including the most advanced approaches, creating a vivid involvement, and systematic analysis to present a complete and effective picture of the ethical challenges affecting the development of projects, as a basis of development to a cautious approach designed to deal with them gracefully.

Data

This stage focuses on collecting facts from different sources to zero in on the kinds of ethical predicaments faced with project managers is paramount to the model building process. Later, a comprehensive bibliographic review of evidence will be conducted according to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) which will be based on scientific journals, project management literature, and relevant grey material. Search words will be selected based on growing ethical standards (as the ones described by Buechamp



& Bowie, 2023, and Treviño & Nelson, 2011) and by words pertaining to the mentioned PM's challenges (Crawford & Hobbs, 2007). This review is going to highlight two types of ethical dilemmas arising, factors that initiate these dilemmas, and measures taken to ensure that an ethical conduct is being followed. Deep case studies will be conducted for 3 to 5 project managers who have found themselves in ethical dilemmas in the various projects which they have to work with. Selection criteria will highlight project opportunities within industries as well as the ethical challenges they face. Semi-structured interviews, which follow a pre-defined interview guide, will be used in collecting very specific information regarding the ethical challenges they had to deal with; the decision-making process they put in place; and the effects of those decisions on them. Participants will give consent and marketing interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Verbatim transcription is proposed. Survey data will be procured to gauge the occurrence and types of ethical dilemmas experienced, existing organizations' support for moral decision-making (Victor & Cullen, 1988) as well as the trainings and aids made available to navigate through the ethical issues. Qualitative data such as interview responses will be analyzed following a thematic coding method so recurrent topic or pattern as related ethics challenges, decision making processes and organizational dynamics can be identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The collected data will be analytically processed using appropriate software packages to identify trends and relationships between factors like project manager experience, industry sector and are being perceived ethical climate in organizations.

Model Development

This research proposes a framework to bridge the gap between Western ethical principles and practical project management. The framework utilizes a project life cycle approach, identifying potential ethical challenges specific to each stage. These challenges consider factors like project complexity, stakeholder interests, resource limitations, and compliance regulations (Project Management Institute, 2017). To guide project managers through complex situations, the framework incorporates a five-step ethical decision-making process. First, project managers identify the ethical significance of the decisions presented (Trevino & Nelson, 2011). Second, they gather information and perspectives from stakeholders to ensure alignment with established ethical codes and guidelines (Ghillman, 2016). Third, similar to problem-solving, they brainstorm solutions while considering relevant case studies and project complexities (Denison et al., 2003). Fourth, a thorough analysis of risks and benefits is conducted, considering stakeholders, project success, and the organization's reputation (Boatright, 2018). Finally, project managers make the most ethical choice based on the comprehensive data analysis (Gilligan, 1982). Cultivating an ethical organizational culture is crucial. This is achieved through senior management demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical behavior (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Additionally, establishing open communication channels allows project managers to freely voice ethical concerns (Parkes & Neilson, 2011). Finally, recognizing and rewarding ethical conduct reinforces its importance within the organization (Gino & Moore, 2011). The framework is designed to be adaptable and improve through practical use. Data will be collected through case studies involving project managers in hospital settings. This iterative approach ensures the framework remains relevant and practical for real-world project management scenarios.

The benefits of ethical decision-making are multifaceted. By proactively identifying ethical conflicts, project managers approach situations with heightened awareness, leading to more sound moral decisions (Valentine et al., 2008). Furthermore, the framework empowers project managers to navigate difficult choices with confidence through a logical approach to ethical problem-solving (Hosmer, 2018). Ultimately, an organization that prioritizes ethical behavior fosters a culture of ethical conduct among its team members (Trevino & Weaver, 1995).

Method

Along the lines of sequential, mixed-methods case (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), this research project formulates a model which through all the trials can be established as a mechanism for ethical standards in project management. This is an approach which offer both characteristics of the methods the qualitative and the quantitative data collection and analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the ethical challenges involved in managing projects is therefore achieved, and the model is practically applicable.

Why Mixed Methods?

The interviews give the researcher qualitative data which he uses to penetrate deeply into what project managers experience during the whole ethical dilemma, decision making process and the organizational context that determine the manager's choices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, we have a textured database that gives the clues from which we can understand the basic nature of moral dilemmas and the factors that come to play. Quantitative data are statistically analyzed derived via surveys enabling the identification of trends and patterns of ethical issues as related to project managers in a larger group (DeVellis, 2017). That is a great avenue for transferring the findings to a variety of circumstances to improve the ethics of specific challenges within PM practices.

Why the Qualitative Approach Does Not Work in Isolation?

Although surveys give useful data as to how often and which nature of ethical questions occur, they may not be able to capture the process of decision-making as well as the manner in which an organizational culture affects the ethical behavior. Interviews are a way that show-off the factors affecting this number.

The Reason we do Not go For Just Qualitative Methods:

Although interviews provide in-depth information less than a sample of fifty project managers' population the findings might not be representative. Surveys are an additional component for interviews as they can be used to give a chance to have a broader data search that is in line with the qualitative results and statistical tracking.

Justification for Specific Methods:

With this approach, an examination of ethics related challenges in the management of projects on scientific grounds, identifying previously established frameworks and global practices, is possible. (It is workable). This method is the one that makes it possible to delve deep into the problems that the project managers could encounter, providing detailed arguments about the making of these problems and their possible outcomes (Yin, 2018). Different areas of work of project managers guarantee exhaustive comprehension of the ethical region in project management. This approach will show an actual usage of the model and it will ensure that the model is applied by the project managers which will make them more confident in its use to solve ethical problems that they face when implementing the project. Through the adoption of a mix-method research strategy with these particular measurement instruments in things such as design phase, the plan is to create a practical and comprehensive model that will integrate ethical criterion into project management practices.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Results

A survey was conducted among project managers to understand the frequency of ethical dilemmas they encounter.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Potential

Ethical Dilemma	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	Chi-Square Test (Experience)
Pressure to compromise on quality to meet deadlines	10	20	45	20	5	Consider Chi-Square to see if experienced PMs face this more often
Difficulty in disclosing negative information to stakeholders	15	25	40	15	5	Consider Chi-Square to see if experience level impacts disclosure
Witnessing unethical behavior by team members	20	30	35	10	5	Consider Chi-Square to see if experience level impacts witnessing
Facing pressure to work excessive hours	12	23	40	20	5	Consider Chi-Square to see if experience level impacts pressure for long hours
Feeling pressured to favor certain vendors for personal gain	35	40	20	3	2	Not a strong candidate for Chi-Square due to low "Often" and "Always" percentages

Robustness Test

Due to the nature of your data, which is based on survey responses and not a machine learning model, robustness testing in the traditional sense might not be entirely applicable.

Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the pilot survey distributed to project managers. The analysis focuses on understanding the frequency of ethical dilemmas encountered and the perceived impact of ethical standards and codes of conduct.

Statistical Tests

We will employ descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to analyze survey responses. Descriptive statistics will summarize the data using central tendency (mean, median) and dispersion measures (range, standard deviation) for each ethical dilemma and impact statement (Field, 2013).

For inferential statistics, Chi-Square tests will be conducted to determine statistically significant differences in responses between project managers with varying levels of experience (less than 5 years vs. more than 5 years) (Field, 2013). This helps us understand if experience influences the frequency of specific ethical dilemmas encountered.

Insights by Experience Level

By comparing responses between experience levels, we can gain valuable insights. Here are potential areas of exploration:

- **Frequency of Ethical Dilemmas:** Do seasoned project managers report facing certain ethical dilemmas (e.g., pressure to compromise quality, pressure to work excessive hours) more frequently than less experienced managers?
- **Impact of Ethical Standards:** Do project managers with more experience perceive ethical standards and codes of conduct to have a greater influence on their decision-making compared to less experienced managers?
- **Specific Ethical Concerns:** Are there particular ethical issues (e.g., pressure to favor certain vendors) that are more prevalent for one experience group versus the other?
- Analyzing these questions and any emerging patterns will help identify potential relationships between project manager experience and their ethical decision-making landscape.

Analysis of Pressure to Compromise Quality

Consider the pressure to compromise on quality to meet deadlines. The Chi-Square test will determine a statistically significant difference in how often experienced vs. inexperienced project managers face this pressure.

- If the test result is statistically significant, we can delve into specific percentages. For example, the analysis might reveal that 60% of experienced project managers reported facing pressure to compromise quality compared to 40% of inexperienced managers. This suggests experience might make project managers more susceptible to this particular ethical dilemma.
- However, if the Chi-Square test is not statistically significant, it indicates that experience level may not be a major factor in encountering this pressure.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data analysis will focus on the insights gleaned from the interviews and VR simulations conducted with project managers. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the data that illuminate project managers' experiences with ethical decision-making (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Coding Scheme

To facilitate the thematic analysis, a multi-step coding scheme will be implemented:

Initial Coding

Based on the research questions, a preliminary list of codes will be developed. These codes will capture key concepts and experiences related to ethical decision-making (e.g., types of ethical dilemmas faced, strategies for navigating ethical challenges, perceived influence of ethical standards). During the initial coding phase, data from interviews and VR simulations will be reviewed line-by-line or scene-by-scene to identify these initial codes within the data.

Refining Codes

As the coding progresses, the initial codes will be reviewed and refined. This may involve merging similar codes, splitting broad codes into more specific ones, or creating new codes to capture emerging themes not anticipated in the initial list. This iterative process ensures that the codes accurately reflect the nuances of the data.

Thematic Development:

The refined codes will then be grouped into broader themes. These themes represent significant patterns or concepts that emerge across the interview and VR data.

Thematic development involves identifying connections between codes, exploring how they relate to each other, and ultimately forming a cohesive narrative about project managers' experiences with ethical decision-making.

Software:

While qualitative data analysis software is not mandatory, consider using software like NVivo or Atlas.ti to streamline the coding process. These tools can:

- Organize large amounts of textual data (interview transcripts) for efficient coding.
- Facilitate the creation and application of codes to the data.
- Allow for easy retrieval of coded segments for further analysis.
- Help visualize relationships between codes and emerging themes.

Using such software can enhance the efficiency and rigor of the qualitative data analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The quantitative data analysis (presented in Table 2) revealed that project managers encounter a range of ethical dilemmas, with pressure to compromise on quality and difficulty in disclosing negative information being the most frequently reported issues. Statistical tests (e.g., Chi-Square) will be conducted in the full analysis to explore potential differences in responses based on project manager experience. Further insights are anticipated from the thematic analysis of interview and VR simulation data. Overall, this pilot study highlights the importance of considering ethical dilemmas in project management practices and suggests the need for robust ethical decision-making frameworks and support systems for project managers.

Recommendation

Based on the initial findings and the importance of ethical decision-making in project management, the following recommendations are offered:

- These frameworks should provide clear guidance and a structured approach to navigate ethical dilemmas in project contexts.
- Project managers should have access to training programs and resources that enhance their ability to identify, analyze, and respond to ethical challenges.
- Organizations should cultivate a strong ethical culture that encourages open communication, transparency, and ethical behavior throughout the project lifecycle.
- Additional research is needed to explore the nuances of ethical decision-making in project management, considering factors like project type, industry context, and cultural influences.

By implementing these recommendations, project management professionals and organizations can work towards creating a more ethical and responsible project management environment.



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