



# Ethical Implications & dissemination of evaluation findings

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# Objectives



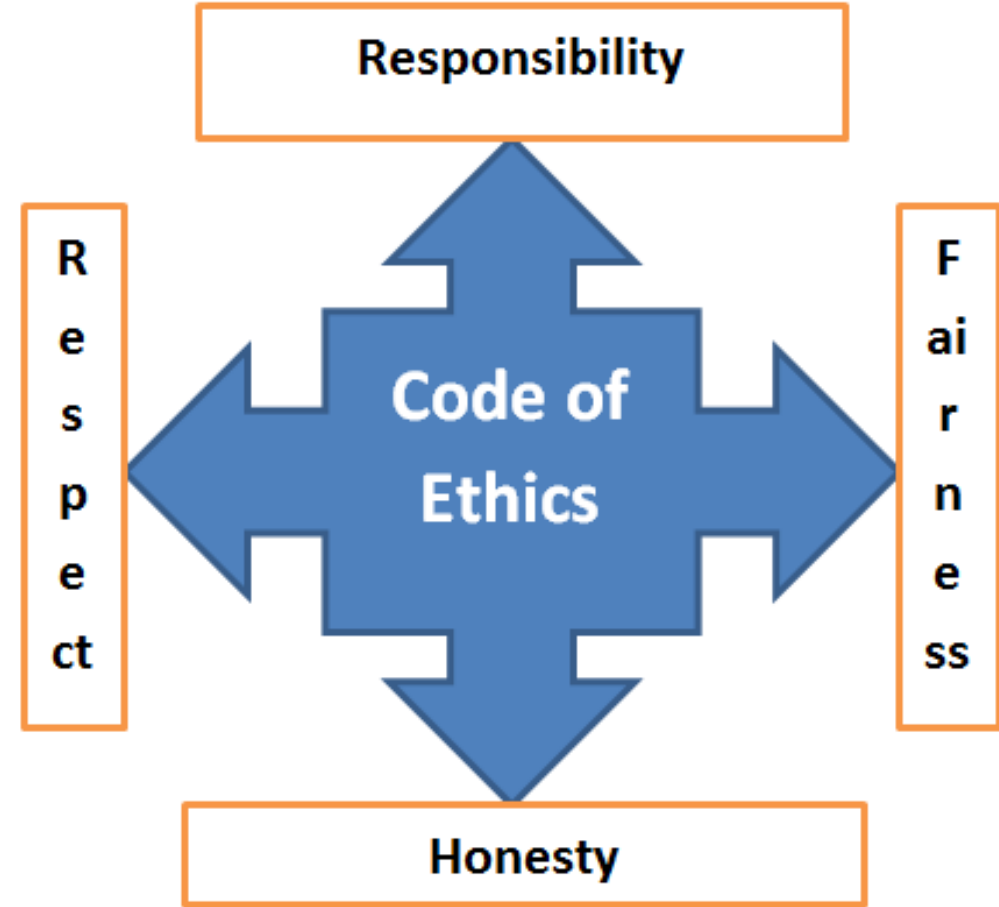
1. Define ethics in the context of project management and explain its relevance.
2. Identify the four core values central to project management and describe their significance.
3. Explain the ethical principles related to research and evaluation, including the Social Research Association Evaluation Society's guidelines and the Government Social Research (GSR) service's five principles.
4. Describe the legal and ethical considerations related to informed consent, data protection, equality, and privacy.
5. Recognize the unique ethical considerations in social media research.
6. Discuss the ethical principles for protecting participants and avoiding harm in research.
7. Differentiate between traditional research methodologies and social media research in terms of ethical considerations.





# What are ethics?

- Ethics in project management are certain beliefs about what is morally acceptable or appropriate.
- It comprises the values of responsibility, honesty, respect and fairness.
- These four core values are central to the project management profession and must be adhered to by project management professionals





# Ethics in project management



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Ethical considerations should be active in evaluation design, delivery, and reporting.



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Evaluation, like social research, raises ethical problems that may affect methodologies, fieldwork, and reporting.

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Ethical project management involves minimizing environmental impact, promoting diversity and inclusion, and contributing to the well-being of local communities.

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The consequences of unethical project management can be severe, leading to reputational damage, legal disputes, and financial losses.

# Stakeholder groups and their ethical considerations



## 1. Participants

- Protecting confidentiality
- Avoiding harm Minimizing respondent burden and avoiding intrusion
- Avoiding manipulation or deception

## 2. Colleagues/ partner agencies

- Reporting of controversial or potentially damaging findings (e.g.reputational)
- Additional burden created through collection and sharing of data
- Authorship and appropriate credit



# Stakeholder groups and their ethical considerations

## 3. Funders, employers and researchers

- Tendering rules and procedures
- Contractual clarity and division of responsibilities
- Rules/norms of publication
- Protecting fieldworkers
- Whistle-blowing

## 4. Wider society

- Protecting the vulnerable
- Publishing publicly-funded research
- Being honest about the limitations of research



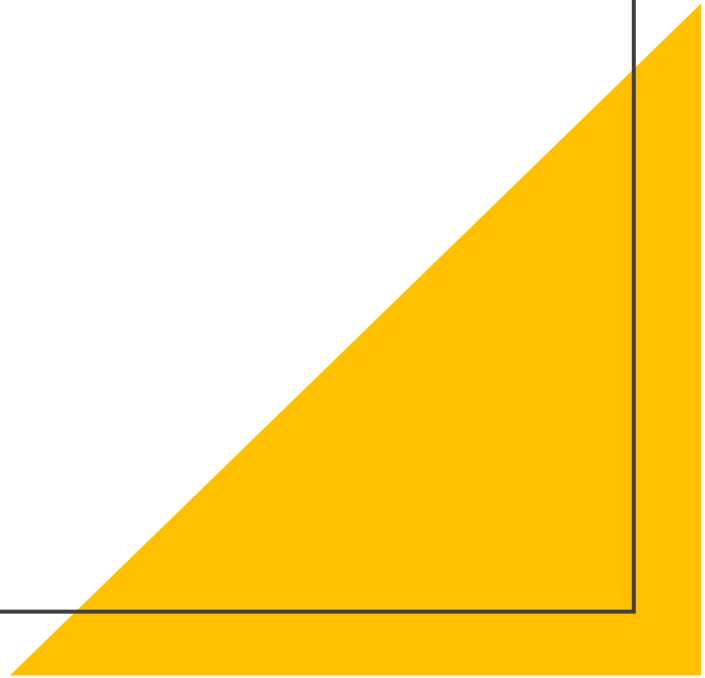
# Ethical principles

- There are a number of sources of guidance on research ethics, including the Social Research Association Evaluation Society.
- In government, the Government Social Research (GSR) service (UK) has guidance on ethics, which is applicable to evaluation. It has five principles.



1. Sound application and conduct of social research methods, and interpretation of the findings.

- All methodology, analysis, and reporting should be effective, withstand external examination, and address an unmet need.





## 2: Participation based on informed consent

- Research participants must give informed consent to collect, analyse, transfer, store, and link data. A person gives continuing informed consent to engage in the evaluation if they understand the research's aim and their involvement in it.
- how data will be managed; how data will be used in the future; that their participation is voluntary / they can withdraw at any time.





### 3. Enabling participation

- Discrimination based on ‘protected characteristics’ as age, handicap, sex, sexual orientation, or race is illegal.
- Consider geographical, cultural, economic, and communication constraints. The evaluation should identify potential barriers to participation (e.g., people with disabilities, people living in excluded communities where interviewers are unwilling to travel, people whose first language is not English, or people without a permanent address) and reasonable solutions.
- The merits and cons of reaching potentially excluded populations should be considered for each research tool, and inclusion strategies should be devised throughout the design.



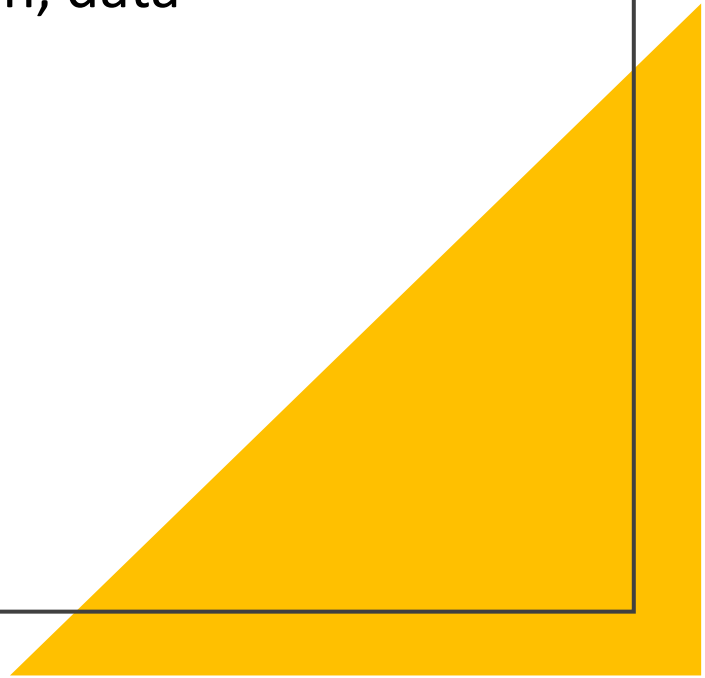
## 4. Avoidance of personal and social harm

- Research participants (including dropouts), social groups or organizations, and researchers should be protected physically, socially, and psychologically throughout the research process.
- Data collection for evaluations should not invade respondents' privacy. For instance, discussing illness and job loss may be distressing or traumatic for certain individuals.
- A formal risk assessment may be needed when there is 'more than minimal' danger to participants, especially when research concerns vulnerable populations (e.g., children, offenders, or disabled persons) and/or socially sensitive issues like mental health, according to GSR.



## 5: Non-disclosure of identity

- The identity of, and data belonging to, participants and potential participants (including information about the decision whether or not to participate), should be protected throughout the research process, including respondent recruitment, data collection, data storage, analysis and reporting.



## Informed consent raises a number of legal issues that are outlined in:



- **Data Protection Act** -which sets out regulations for the processing of information relating to individuals, and what information individuals can request about themselves
- **General Data Protection Regulations** - which sets out rules on controlling and processing personally identifiable information;
- **Equality act**- which requires public bodies to ensure their work supports equality by treating people from different groups fairly and equally. Therefore, evaluations should be conducted in a way that enables people from different groups to participate;
- **Mental Health Act**- which stipulates that research should only involve those lacking mental capacity under certain conditions;
- **Freedom of Information Act** - which provides a right of access to information held by a public authority, including research information.



# Ethics in social media research



- As social media research and assessment develops, ethical considerations may not apply as well as in traditional research methodologies. Following the GSR's five essential principles, the government's Social Media Research Group (UK) has issued five guidelines.

Principle	Key consideration
1: Sound application and conduct of social research methods and interpretation of the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are social media strategies the best approach?</li><li>• Do techniques have a professional application?</li><li>• Is there enough quality control in place?</li><li>• Are all project specifics, such as the data being used and the study goal, available to the public?</li></ul>
2: Participation based on informed consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do user agreements include data collection, analysis, and use?</li><li>• How will participants be contacted for informed consent?</li><li>• Does consent stand if social media data is deleted?</li></ul>



# Ethical principles for social media research



Principle	Key consideration
3: Enabling participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are any groups being inappropriately excluded given the nature of the research questions and/or platforms used?</li></ul>
4: Avoidance of personal and social harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the data public or private? Any research involving private content should only be conducted with explicit informed consent from the user.</li><li>• How will the collection of unnecessary personal data minimized?</li></ul>
5. Non-disclosure of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will the identity of users be protected? (There can be no guarantee of full anonymity with social media research. If researchers wish to include verbatim content, they should consider contacting social media users to ask them if they would be happy for their content to be cited.)</li></ul>

# Developing an evaluation use and dissemination plan



- There is no fixed way to develop an evaluation use and dissemination plan. The key is considering the four questions below:
  1. **Which groups?** It is worth considering all potential users individually as it is easy to miss key stakeholders who might have very different needs from the evaluation. A stakeholder mapping exercise can be useful.
  2. **What information?** Knowing what information is needed by each group should inform the evaluation questions posed.
  3. **Which point in time?** There will be decision points throughout the implementation and delivery of any intervention. Knowing these points can allow the various data collection plans in place to be designed to meet these requirements.



# Developing an evaluation use and dissemination plan



4. **For what purpose?** Evaluation evidence can be used for various purposes, which will impact on the type of evidence generated and how it is used and disseminated.

This is particularly important for interim decision points. When the decision is small (for example, a review of staffing numbers to support the intervention), emerging monitoring data may suffice. However, if the decision is large (for example, whether to roll out an intervention nationally), the evidence needs will be much greater and call for a much higher level of robustness.



# Developing an evaluation and dissemination plan



- Identifying these needs during evaluation design allows for early discussion, negotiation, and expectation management.
- The strategy should include what will be published, when, and how (paper, hard, social media, seminars, conference presentations). This should contain decision points and when evidence will be available. Reports, data, and research tools should be published.
- Including ‘influence objectives’ in the use and distribution plan can help. Evaluation influence objectives specify the desired impact. For example, an evaluation could be conducted to identify good practice in prison rehabilitation schemes.
- The influence objective could be using the evaluation findings to positively change the way that rehabilitation programmes are implemented.
- Influence objectives are clear, the evaluation outputs can be tailored to meet this goal.





# Developing an evaluation and dissemination plan

- It is good practice to agree the use and dissemination plan with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible; this is typically covered by the programme board and steering group. This early interaction can also help focus and manage expectations since not all queries can be answered.
- The use and dissemination plan can also be developed with departmental press offices (to agree on the general principles and broad approach) and ministers' offices (to get their buy-in and agreement to publication plans up front). To avoid the impression that findings affect publication decisions, this is best practice.





# Developing an evaluation and dissemination plan

- Once the different audiences and their evidence needs are known and prioritized, reporting and communications should be tailored to meet these needs.
- The value of tailoring communications in this way cannot be underestimated. Improving the usability of the findings by helping specific audiences understand how findings directly relate to their areas of interest and can be invaluable in ensuring the findings are used.
- Improving the use of the findings involves considering which groups have the capacity to act on the findings, in what ways and the constraints they may be under.





# Disseminating evaluation findings

- Selecting and using the best outputs and communication channels is crucial.
- An evaluation study's final report is vital, but it rarely ensures impact and influence.
- Alternative communication methods include one-page summaries, videos, infographics, data sharing, newsletters, social media, conference presentations, and seminars.
- It is inappropriate to discuss findings publicly before publication. Before publishing, steering groups and policy/delivery heads should support the messages, especially when managing bad findings.
- Quality assurance, editing, ministerial clearance, and press office input make publication resource-intensive for government evaluation managers. If appropriate, publish regular, short outputs to release findings and allow for rapid utilization.



# Building an evaluation culture

- Evaluation should be interwoven into an organization's culture and operations.
- This means that evaluative and reflective practice is part of the 'way we do things around here' where all colleagues explore, learn, and scrutinize their evidence.
- It suggests that excellent policy practice requires attaching value to policy implementation, rather than viewing evaluation as a necessary evil or ritualistic necessity.



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# Openness and transparency



- Openness and transparency should be the default to allow others to critique, learn from, and imitate approaches. Publishing the communications plan so outsiders know what will be published when is also good.
- The whole record should include how evaluation outputs were obtained, even though immediate users may not need to know. For openness and reader convenience, technical annexes, data tables, peer review comments, etc. provide extra methodological detail.
- Archiving data should be considered if others can benefit from its use, provided the expenditures are proportional. Evaluations that address specific questions can illuminate a larger range of issues, enhancing the value of data collecting costs.



- HMT Magenta Book: Prudential standards in the Financial Services Bill: Policy statement, 2020. . HM Treasury, United Kingdom.

# References



**Thank you**