

Oral presentation OP782

Challenges for employees in a time of pandemics and advances in artificial intelligence; or “is our psychology relevant any more”?

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science&practice

Research goals and why the work was worth doing

Our work is at an unusual intersection of professional psychology and professional business ethics. We partnered in an international survey examining ethical and unethical behaviour in industry. We make longitudinal comparisons of ethical behaviour with a focus on the ethical implications of Covid19 and the growing role of Artificial Intelligence in the work environment and in social lives.

There has been much consideration of the impact of the pandemic by the social sciences, this has focused on changing patterns of work, health and particularly mental health. In particular we consider the ‘moral hazard’ raised in decision-making during the pandemic. Separately we examine ‘rights’ impacted by the increasing use of artificial intelligence. Industrial responses are examined, the experience of “workers” foregrounded, and the real-world challenges to academic and practitioner colleagues that arise as a consequence discussed.

This work uniquely represents the “user voice”. It means that we, who seek to understand the world of work, can openly and honestly consider our response to these contentious ethical domains.

Theoretical background

Psychology as a profession has been argued to be fundamentally ethical and values-based (Kwiatkowski & Duncan, 2006; Lefkowitz, 2014). However, psychologists wear “multiple hats” (Sternberg, 2008) and so ethical questions inevitably arise. If we are not simply to be “Servants of Power” (Baritz, 1960), automatically dancing to our paymasters’ tune we must fully understand the ethical landscape that impacts our science and practice.

There are many ethical pressures and dilemmas faced by working people who do not have the privilege associated with psychologist or academic status, and who have to daily engage with issues of ethics, misconduct, compromise, compliance, whistleblowing, dishonesty, and drags on development.

Two important and contentious sets of experiences, concerning the pandemic and the rise of artificial intelligence need to be kept in sight and examined. The ethical aspects of the changes brought about by these recent phenomena and the impact on work psychology, including changes to come, are particularly significant.

Design/Methodology/Approach/Intervention

The field work was carried out by professional market research organisation calling on a stratified sample of 9834 working adults (18+) from 13 countries. The survey has 125 questions including questions on age, gender, sector employed, company size, and managerial responsibilities. Main areas of investigation are 1) “the acceptability of” a range of unethical behaviours; 2) how prevalent “honesty” is in the organisation’s daily operations;

3) a range of misconducts the participant is aware of; 4) reasons why employees will not speak up; and 5) managerial attitudes toward ethical behaviour in the workplace.

Results obtained or expected

We will present a variety of temporal (2015, 2018, and 2021) and geographical (13 countries in 2021) comparisons; for instance concerning the prevalence of ethical and unethical behaviours, focusing on change over time, and considering attitudes to the impact of the pandemic and the adoption of artificial intelligence in the workplace. However, our main focus (as well as utilising the data itself) will be to draw out the importance of these considerations for the field of psychology.

Limitations

The usual considerations of snapshot survey / testing design apply; however, the survey is well designed and robust, and this dataset has a longitudinal component; further our purpose is actually to challenge psychological thinking using this analysis as a key stimulus.

Research/Practical Implications

Our paper will bring both academic and practitioner psychologists face-to-face with real ethical dilemmas experienced by working people. It will therefore challenge both theory and practice and will question some core principles of work and organisational psychology; if we are not involved in a fundamentally ethical endeavour then our work is a chimera.

Originality/Value

EAWOP was a signatory (2016) and key member of the “alliance for organisational psychology memorandum of understanding and fostering ethical relevant and rigorous research” which we support. We suggest that ethically relevant and rigorous practice are both critically important. Given the critique of “novelty” in that memorandum we hesitate to use that term; however, we are not aware that exactly this sort of material has previously been presented.

Intended audience

Both academics and practitioners. Specifically, the interactions between the adoption of artificial intelligence in the workplace as well as the status of being a “key worker” or not during the pandemic with the instances of unethical behaviour observed or showed in the workplace will doubtless attract commentary on the reasons behind our results.

Keywords: Ethics, Employees, Psychology