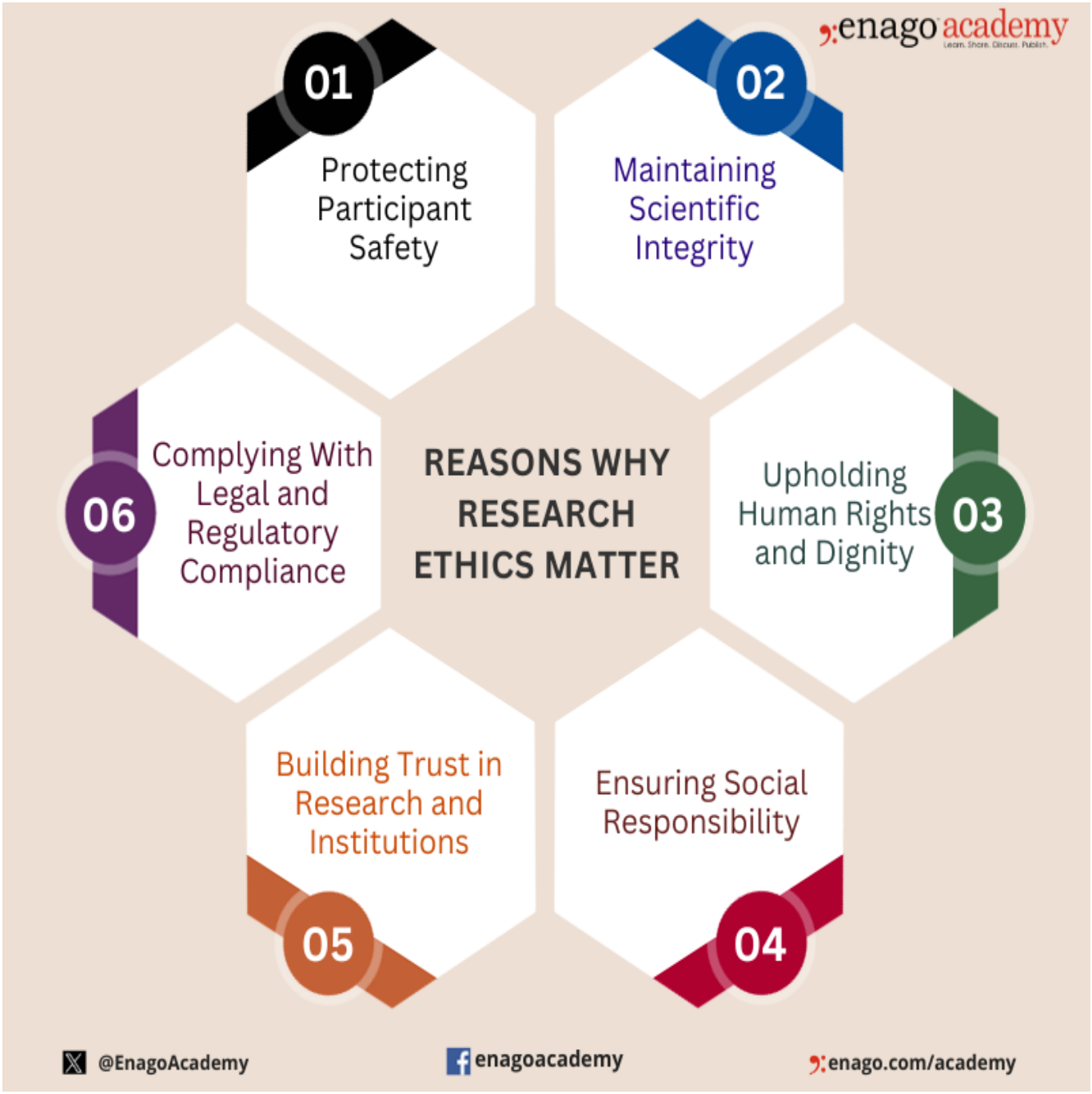


Description

When I began my work on the thesis I was always focused on my research. However, once I began to make my way through research, I realized that research ethics is a core aspect of the research work and the foundation of research design.

Research ethics play a crucial role in ensuring the responsible conduct of research. Here are some key reasons why research ethics matter:

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Research ethics protect the rights and well-being of participants, uphold the integrity of research findings, and contribute to the positive impact of research on individuals and society.

Let us look into some of the major ethical considerations in research design.

Ethical Issues in Research

There are many organizations, like the Committee on Publication Ethics, dedicated to promoting ethics in scientific research. These organizations agree that ethics is not an afterthought or side note to the research study. It is an integral aspect of research that needs to remain at the forefront of our work.

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- ## Validity

The research design must address specific research questions. Hence, the conclusions of the study must correlate to the questions posed and the results. Also, research ethics demands that the methods used must relate specifically to the research questions.

- ## Voluntary Participation and Consent

An individual should at no point feel any coercion to participate in a study. This includes any type of persuasion or deception in attempting to gain an individual's trust.

Informed consent states that an individual must give their explicit consent to participate in the study. You can think of consent form as an agreement of trust between the researcher and the participants.

- ## Sampling

Sampling is the first step in research design. You will need to explain why you want a particular group of participants. You will have to explain why you left out certain people or groups. In addition, if your sample includes children or special needs individuals, you will have additional requirements to address like parental permission.

- ## Confidentiality

The third ethics principle of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) states that: "The confidentiality of the information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected." However, sometimes confidentiality is limited. For example, if a participant is at risk of harm, we must protect them. This might require releasing confidential information.

- ## Risk of Harm

We should do everything in our power to protect study participants. For this, we should focus on the risk to benefit ratio. If possible risks outweigh the benefits, then we should abandon or redesign the study. Risk of harm also requires us to measure the risk to benefit ratio as the study progresses.

- ## Research Methods

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We know there are numerous research methods. However, when it comes to ethical considerations, some key questions can help us find the right approach for our studies.

i. Which methods most effectively fit the aims of your research?

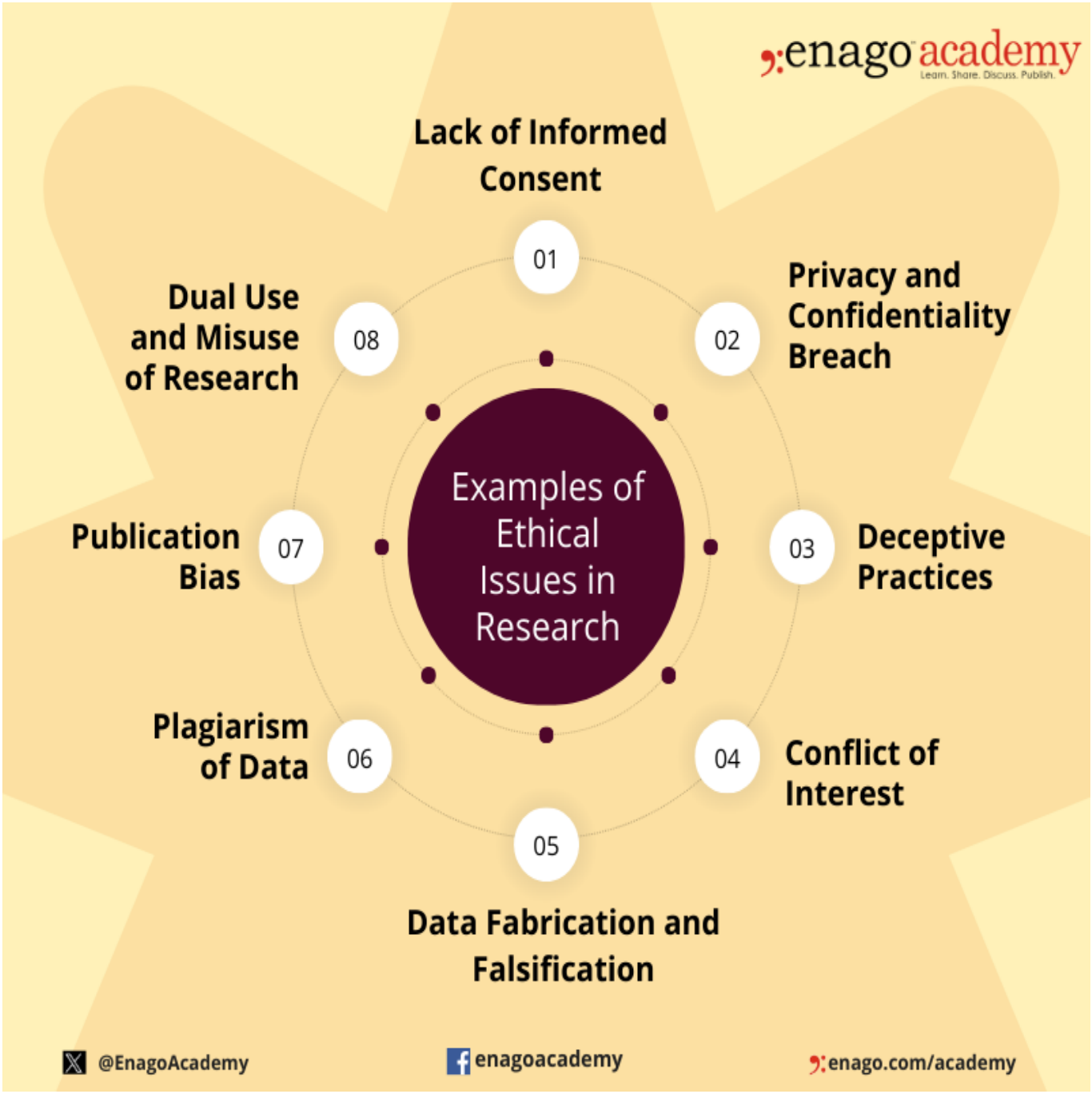
ii. What are the strengths and restrictions of a particular method?

iii. Are there potential risks when using a particular research method?

For more guidance, you can refer to the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics.

Ethical issues in research can arise at various stages of the research process and involve different aspects of the study. Here are some common examples of ethical issues in research:

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Addressing these ethical issues requires adherence to ethical guidelines, and ongoing ethical reflection throughout the research process. Researchers, institutions, and regulatory bodies play a collective role in ensuring the responsible conduct of research.

Institutional Review Boards

The importance of ethics in research cannot be understated. Following ethical guidelines will ensure your study's validity and promote its contribution to scientific study. On a personal level, you will strengthen your research and increase your opportunities to gain funding.

To address the need for ethical considerations, most institutions have their own Institutional Review

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Board (IRB). An IRB secures the safety of human participants and prevents violation of human rights. It reviews the research aims and methodologies to ensure ethical practices are followed. If a research design does not follow the set ethical guidelines, then the researcher will have to amend their study.

Applying for Ethical Approval

Applications for ethical approval will differ across institutions. Regardless, they focus on the benefits of your research and the risk to benefit ratio concerning participants. Therefore, you need to effectively address both in order to get ethical clearence.

- **Participants**

It is vital that you make it clear that individuals are provided with sufficient information in order to make an informed decision on their participation. In addition, you need to demonstrate that the ethical issues of consent, risk of harm, and confidentiality are clearly defined.

- **Benefits of the Study**

You need to prove to the panel that your work is essential and will yield results that contribute to the scientific community. For this, you should demonstrate the following:

i. The conduct of research guarantees the quality and integrity of results.

ii. The research will be properly distributed.

iii. The aims of the research are clear and the methodology is appropriate.

- **Integrity**

Integrity and transparency are vital in the research. Ethics committees expect you to share any actual or potential conflicts of interest that could affect your work. In addition, you have to be honest and transparent throughout the approval process and the research process.

The Dangers of Unethical Practices

There is a reason to follow ethical guidelines. Without these guidelines, our research will suffer. Moreover, more importantly, people could suffer.

The following are just two examples of infamous cases of unethical research practices that demonstrate the importance of adhering to ethical standards:

- The Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) aimed to investigate the psychological effects of power

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using the relationship between prisoners and prison officers. Those assigned the role of “prison officers” embraced measures that exposed “prisoners” to psychological and physical harm. In this case, there was voluntary participation. However, there was disregard for welfare of the participants.

- Recently, Chinese scientist He Jiankui announced his work on genetically edited babies. Over 100 Chinese scientists denounced this research, calling it “crazy” and “shocking and unacceptable.” This research shows a troubling attitude of “do first, debate later” and a disregard for the ethical concerns of manipulating the human body Wang Yuedan, a professor of immunology at Peking University, calls this “an ethics disaster for the world” and demands strict punishments for this type of ethics violation.

What are your experiences with research ethics? How have you developed an ethical approach to research design? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Category

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