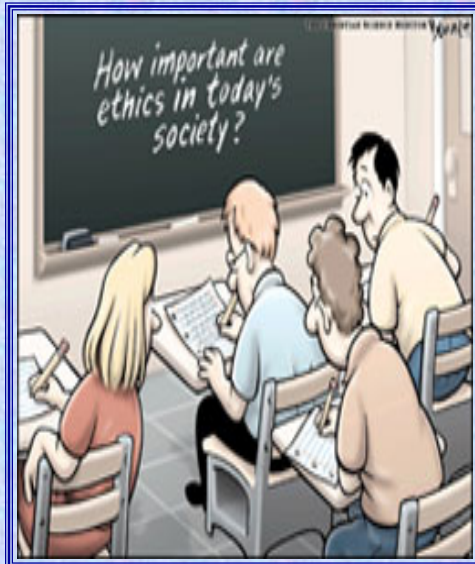


**Summer Institute on Program
Evaluation 2026**

**ETHICS IN
EVALUATIONS**

**Gerry Kaplan
(Kaplan Research Associates Inc.)**

June 8, 2026



Presentation Objectives:

- To explore potential ethical issues experienced by some evaluators
- To explore ethical standards related to evaluation practice (Tri-County Policy, CES standards, SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation)
- To explore ethical standards for organizations, government departments, etc. undertaking evaluations

**EVALUATORS'
EXPERIENCES WITH
ETHICAL ISSUES**

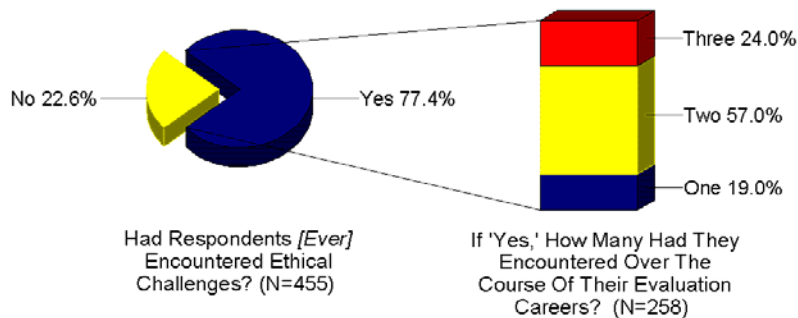


**Results of the Canadian
Evaluation Society
Membership Report On
*Ethical Challenges Related
To Their Evaluation Practices***

(With a 25% Response Rate)

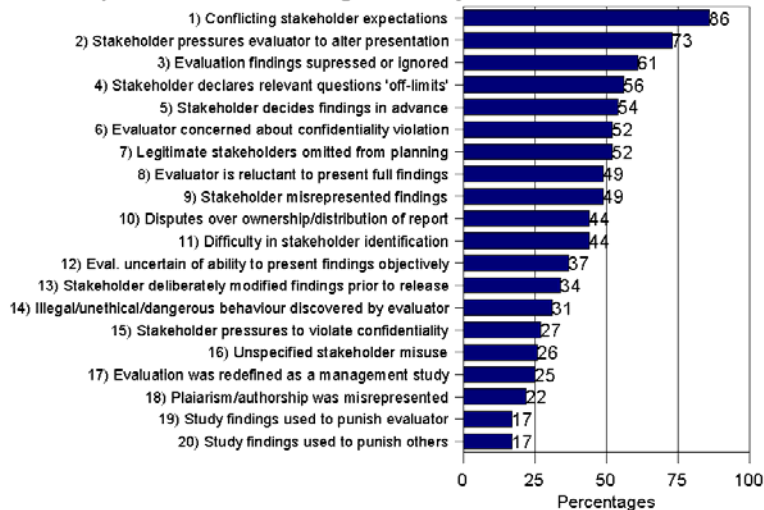
(Wayne MacDonald & Heather Buchanan, 2011)

1) Have CES Respondents Ever Faced An Ethical Challenge?



(CES Report Findings, Wayne MacDonald & Heather Buchanan. Adapted from Summer Institute presentation 2011.)

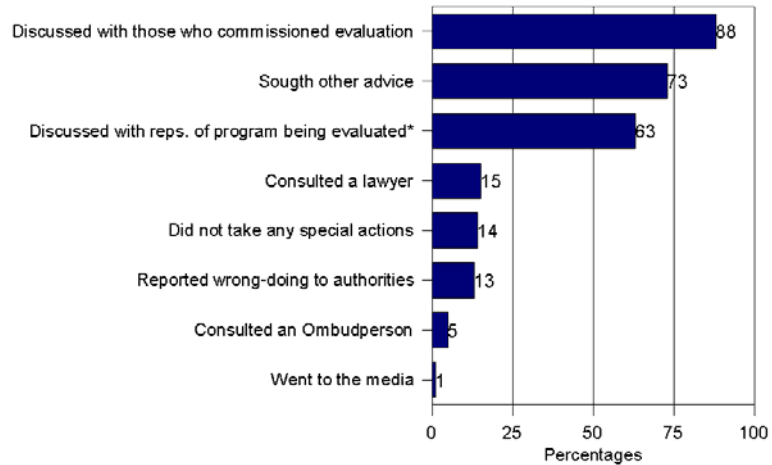
2) Ethical Challenges Respondents Faced



(N=338. Multiple responses are allowed.)

(CES Report Findings, Wayne MacDonald & Heather Buchanan. Adapted from Summer Institute presentation 2011.)

3) Actions Respondents Took To Resolve These Situations



(N=259. Multiple responses are allowed.)

(*CES Report Findings*, Wayne MacDonald & Heather Buchanan. Adapted from Summer Institute presentation 2011.)



What ethical challenges have you faced regarding your research or evaluation activities?

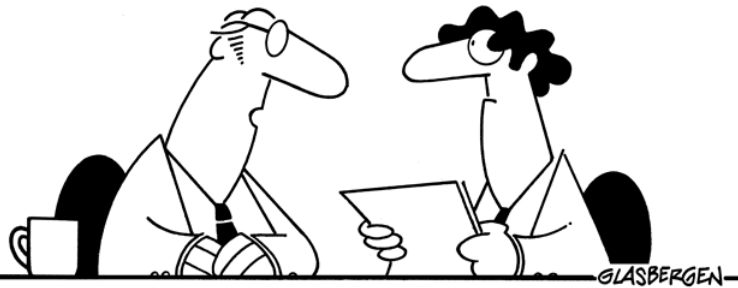
What did you do about them?



What kinds of ethical issues might evaluators experience today?

What steps could (should) they take to address their concerns?

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“Explain it to me one more time. What’s the difference between ethical behavior and being an annoying goody-two-shoes nerd?”

An Overview Of Research Ethics In Canada

THREE DOCUMENTS (BRIEFLY) REVIEWED

- **The Federal Government's Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans**
- **CES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct**
- **SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation**

The Tri-Council Policy Statement Regarding Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans

An Overview Of The Tri-Council Policy Statement

Respect For Human Dignity

- **This is expressed through three core principles:**
 - ***Respect for the person***
 - ***Concern for their welfare***
 - ***Justice***

An Overview Of The Tri-Council Policy Statement

1) Respect For The Person:

- *Ethical treatment of persons involved in research as participants, or based on their data, or their human biological materials*
- *The dual moral obligation to respect persons' autonomy, and protect those with developing, impaired or diminished autonomy*
- *Respects participants' autonomy by the respecting their need to provide their free, informed and ongoing consent to participate*

An Overview Of The Tri-Council Policy Statement

2) Concern For Their Welfare:

- *Includes participants' physical, mental and spiritual health, and their physical, economic and social circumstances*
- *Researchers should attempt to achieve the most favourable balance of risks and potential benefits for participants.*

An Overview Of The Tri-Council Policy Statement

3) Justice:

- *Refers to the obligation to treat people fairly and equitably, with equal respect and concern*
- *Vulnerability of participants is a key factor*
- *Vulnerable or marginalized people or groups may need to be afforded special attention to be treated justly in research*



The Canadian Evaluation Society's Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

Ethical Conduct Entails:

- **Competence**: Evaluators are to be competent in their provision of service
- **Integrity**: Evaluators are to act with integrity in their relationships with all stakeholders
- **Accountability**: Evaluators are to be accountable for their performance and products (deliverables)

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

1) COMPETENCE: *Evaluators should...*

- ***Apply systematic methods of inquiry***
- ***Possess or provide appropriate content knowledge***
- ***Continuously improve their methodological and practice skills***

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

2) INTEGRITY: *Evaluators should...*

- ***Accurately represent their skills and knowledge***
- ***Declare any conflicts of interest prior to beginning the evaluation process***
- ***Be sensitive to the cultural or social environments of all stakeholder, and act accordingly***

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

2) INTEGRITY: *Evaluators should...*

- ***Confer with their clients, at the outset, regarding:***
 - ***Confidentiality***
 - ***Privacy***
 - ***Communication***
 - ***Ownership of findings and reports***

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

3) ACCOUNTABILITY: *Evaluators are responsible for...*

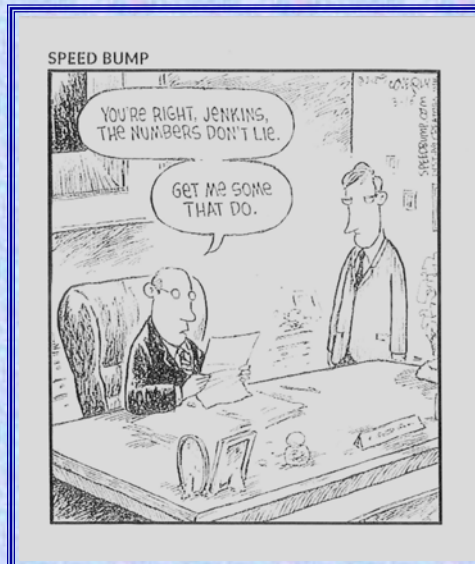
- ***Providing information to clients to facilitate their decision-making regarding evaluation strategies and methods***
- ***Providing clear, accurate and fair written/oral representations of study findings and limitations***
- ***Their fiscal decision-making and ensuring clients receive good value for their dollars***

An Overview Of The CES Guidelines For Ethical Conduct

3) ACCOUNTABILITY: *Evaluators are responsible for...*

- *Ensuring the completion of the evaluation within reasonable time, as agreed to with the client**

*(*With the exception of unforeseen circumstances, or those outside the control of the evaluator. In that case, make sure to keep clients informed about these situations, and what you are doing to rectify them.)*





SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

This section looks at how theoretical ethical issues can impact how we plan and conduct evaluations, as well as how the evaluation findings are used.

[cf. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation]

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Introduction:

- **Ethics in evaluation are focused on what it means for evaluators to “do the right thing.”**
- **There is general agreement that ethical challenges are common in all phases of the evaluation process, from initial contracting to the reporting and use of the findings.**

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Introduction:

- **It is recognized that there are different branches of the field of ethics (meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics) and different criteria (virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialist ethics), all having implications for ethics in evaluation today...**

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Some Definitions:

Meta-ethics: The branch of philosophy that examines the foundations, meaning, and nature of moral judgements;

Cognitivism: A psychological and learning framework that views the mind as an information processor, similar to a computer focusing on how humans receive, organize, store and retrieve information;

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Some Definitions:

Noncognitivism: A meta-ethical theory stating that moral language does not express propositions and therefore cannot be objectively true or false. That is, they are subjectively feelings;

Deontology: An ethical theory that judges the morality of an action based on rules, duties and obligations rather than by its consequences. 'The means do not justify the ends.'

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Some Definitions:

Consequentialism: A normative ethical theory stating that an action is determined solely by its outcome.

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Normative Ethics:

Normative ethics presumes that it is possible to have standards of ethics that are prescriptive* in distinguishing right from wrong (not just descriptive accounts of the standards that people do use), with debates on the appropriateness of the three major positions of virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialism.

*Giving rules, directions or instructions on how things *should* and *must* be done, rather than describing *how* they are currently done.

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Virtue Ethics:

Virtue ethics focus on the quality of an individual's character, which requires some understanding of *why* a particular action was taken. For example, someone who shared internal documents that revealed illegal government behaviour could be viewed as a virtuous whistleblower if the motive was to safeguard the public interest but would be viewed very differently if the motive was a revenge for being passed over for promotion.

SAGE Ethical Issues in Evaluation

Deontological Ethics:

Deontological ethics addresses one's duty and the rights of others. This focus on personal duty and respect for the rights of others guides most efforts to delineate ethical standards and principles for evaluators.

**Some Ethical and Practical
Considerations for Consumers of
Evaluations to Consider**

**These are some of the steps that
organizations or government
departments need to address
before beginning the evaluation
process...**

The Evaluation Check-List

- **Know why you're evaluating. What are your evaluation goals?**
- **Develop or update your Logic Model with your:**
 - **Goals**
 - **Measurable objectives**
 - **Related activities**
 - **Measures of success**

The Evaluation Check-List

- **Determine, in advance, how you will handle negative or problematic evaluation findings**
- **Negotiate, in advance, who will own the data and the evaluation report (who has the right to share the evaluation reports or related findings?)**
- **Ensure that you have all resources in place before engaging an evaluator**

The Evaluation Check-List

- ***Ensure that you have adequate time to complete the evaluation, based on the scope of the study, research methods, resources, and access to enough participants to successfully evaluate your program or service***
- ***Have a process in place to ensure the confidentiality (or the anonymity) of your respondents***

The Evaluation Check-List

- ***Be prepared for less than positive results. How will the organization address findings that identify areas in need of change or action?***
- ***Ethically, if you're asking clients or participants to complete a form or questionnaire, you need to ensure that the resulting data will be used for the purposes for which they were intended.***



THE END!!