

Midocean University

College of Administration

Master of Business Administration (MBA)



REPORT ON RESEARCH ETHICS

Application to the MBA Research Project:

**“Evaluating the Strategic Impact of IKTVA on Supply Chain Performance,
Supplier Development, and Local Value Creation:**

Evidence from Saudi Aramco”

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this report was fully prepared and completed in accordance with the Midocean University guidelines following both academic and ethical compliance and standards. Moreover, all the sources of information have been acknowledged and referenced. Finally, this report is totally my own work as per the assignment shared with my academic supervisors.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Meaning
APA	American Psychological Association
COPE	Committee on Publication Ethics
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IKTVA	In-Kingdom Total Value Add
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBA	Master of Business Administration
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SCM	Supply Chain Management
SD	Supplier Development
LVC	Local Value Creation
WMA	World Medical Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

1. Introduction

What is meant by research ethics is the representation of moral principles and professional standards that once followed effectively, will guide researchers throughout their scientific research process. The main objective of these principles is to ensure that all the research activities are conducted responsibly, while being transparent, and to be respectful toward all the participants, institutions and society. Research ethics refers to the set of moral principles, professional standards, and guidelines that govern the conduct of scientific research (Resnik, 2020). Ethical considerations form an integral part of the research process and contribute to the credibility and quality of academic investigations (Walliman, 2021).

Ethical conduct is fundamental in academic research, because it improves the credibility of findings. Ethical research practices contribute to the reliability, validity, and credibility of research findings while protecting participants from potential harm (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Moreover, ethical research practices are important in business and management studies, where researchers often used to collect their information from a variety of sources, not limited to employees, their supervisors, managers, but can extend to organizations and its suppliers.

The main purpose of this report is to investigate the thought of research ethics, while discussing its importance, and to analyze major ethical issues and problems in the scientific research, while reviewing the applicable regulations and standards, and to apply these ethical principles to the selected MBA graduation project entitled “Evaluating the Strategic Impact of IKTVA on Supply Chain Performance, Supplier Development, and Local Value Creation: Evidence from Saudi Aramco.” Research ethics also helps prevent misconduct such as plagiarism, data falsification, fabrication, and conflicts of interest (Bell et al., 2022).

2. Importance of Research Ethics

It was noticed that research ethics is very critical in ensuring both the quality and full integrity of scientific studies and investigations. The result of deploying ethical standards is to help researchers to produce both reliable and trusted findings which can contribute positively to both the professional practice and to add value to the academic knowledge.

2.1 Protection of Research Participants

Protection of research participants is considered as one of the most important benefits of research ethics, as to protect them from harm. It is mandatory to respect and protect individuals who participate in surveys, interviews or experiments. Throughout the research process, their privacy and confidentiality along with their rights must be protected and secured. Participants should not be exposed to physical, psychological, social, or professional harm (Resnik, 2020).

2.2 Enhancing Research Credibility

To improve both the validity and credibility of research outcomes, research ethics must be used effectively. Ethical compliance improves the trustworthiness and credibility of research findings (Saunders et al., 2023).

2.3 Building Public Trust

Since, once stakeholders ensure the studies and research were obtained both accurately and honestly without bias, they can trust the findings, with minimum or no objections or doubts. Additionally, by following ethical compliance, we can make sure that the likelihood of data manipulation and fabrication or biased reporting will be reduced or eliminated at the most. Ethical conduct strengthens confidence in academic institutions and research outcomes (Bell et al., 2022).

2.4 Supporting Effective Decision-Making

Ethical conduct is much more important in business research, because managerial decisions will be influenced by findings, additionally, critical input for strategical planning which can affect the organization in both short and long term. If unethical research is used, it would lead to taking wrong decisions, which ultimately can risk both the employees and the organizations in the short- and long-term aspects as well. Business decisions based on ethically conducted research are generally more reliable and defensible (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

As research ethics participate in social responsibilities by confirming that studies benefit society, while minimizing or eliminating any potential harm. We can increase the public and society's confidence in academic institutions and marketing for sustainable knowledge development, through ethical research.

3. Fundamental Principles of Research Ethics

3.1 Scientific Honesty

Honesty requires researchers to report findings truthfully and accurately (APA, 2020), without any fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation. As per that, researchers must make sure to accurately report methods, results and interpretations.

Example:

Imagine that the survey results indicated that few or some participants believed that IKTVA has limited or minor impact on supplier development. Although these findings are contradicted with the researcher's expectations, he must report these findings honestly.

3.2 Integrity

Integrity requires consistency between ethical principles and research conduct (Resnik, 2020). Throughout all stages of the research process, researchers should conduct studies fairly and responsibly.

Example:

It is highly recommended for the researchers to apply identical survey procedures to all respondents regardless of their roles or positions in the organizations.

3.3 Objectivity

Objectivity minimizes the influence of personal bias on research outcomes (Saunders et al., 2023).

Example:

Regardless of the researcher positive perception of Saudi Aramco's IKTVA program, all the statistical findings and outputs must be reported and interpreted objectively and to be supported by evidence based on collected data.

3.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality can be explained as, to protect personal and organizational information which was collected during the study. Researchers must protect confidential information obtained from participants (APA, 2020).

Example:

To not disclose the respondent's name, company identification and his or her contact details in the final study or to be shared with a third party or group.

3.5 Informed Consent

This requires participants to voluntarily agree to participate in the study after receiving sufficient information about it. Informed consent ensures participants understand the study before agreeing to participate (World Medical Association, 2024).

Example:

Participant should be informed before completing or at the beginning of the questionnaire, by the purpose of the study. Additionally, both confidentiality procedures and his or her right to withdraw at any time, should be informed to him.

4. Ethical Issues in Scientific Research

4.1 Plagiarism

It is happening if the researcher used another person's ideas, words, or work without proper acknowledgment. Plagiarism is considered a serious violation of academic integrity (COPE, 2024).

Example:

By copying any section from previous studies on IKTVA without citation.

4.2 Data Fabrication and Falsification

By creating fictitious data, this is called data fabrication. While by altering and changing existing data to achieve desired results, this is called data falsification. Fabrication and falsification undermine research validity and public trust (Bell et al., 2022).

Example:

By modifying survey results or adding responses that were never collected, with a purpose to improve statistical outputs, is considered unethical. As anything related to the outputs, the future decision taken by the management team might be redirected as their decisions will not be taken fully accurately.

4.3 Research Bias

Bias can occur if the researchers allow personal beliefs or preferences to influence the research outcomes. Bias may affect sampling, analysis, and interpretation of findings (Saunders et al., 2023).

Example:

By selecting only respondents who only support IKTVA, it would probably create what we call sampling bias and compromise the validity of findings. Furthermore, we can explain why this risk is specifically relevant, because the perceptions of IKTVA will differ significantly between Saudi Aramco employees and suppliers. As per that, by obtaining feedback and responses from different and multiple stakeholder groups, will defiantly help in minimizing the issue of sampling bias.

4.4 Privacy Violations

The researchers must not collect unnecessary personal information from the participants and to respect the participants' privacy. Researchers have an ethical obligation to protect participant privacy (APA, 2020).

Example:

By asking unnecessary company financial information that is not related to the study objective and might violate the privacy standards.

4.5 Conflict of Interest

Once personal, professional or financial interest, influence or research decisions, conflict of interest occurs. Conflicts of interest should be disclosed to maintain transparency (Resnik, 2020).

Example:

If the organization or group of people who participate in the study offers direct benefits to the research or group of research and was accepted.

5. Rules and Regulations Governing Research Ethics

Controlling research ethics can be summarized as: institutional, national and international standards. The main objective of these rules and standards is to standardize the research and to

guarantee no deviation by either the researcher nor the evaluator team, and to guarantee all the participants will be evaluated equally and with no bias.

5.1 Institutional Review Boards (IRB)

Normally, the Research Ethics Committees, and or the Institutional Review Boards are doing the evaluating process for the submitted research proposals by the researchers, and this is to ensure the participant or group of participants protection, additionally, to confirm the ethical compliance. Ethics review committees ensure that research involving human participants complies with accepted ethical standards (World Medical Association, 2024).

5.2 APA Ethical Standards

One of the internationally recognized standards regarding the ethical conducts, citation practices and the responsible reporting of the research findings is the American Psychological Association which is abbreviated as APA. APA guidelines provide standards for ethical conduct, citation, and publication practices (APA, 2020).

5.3 University Policies

Normally universities establish internally recognized and shared policies regarding plagiarism, academic integrity, data protection and ethical research practices, that used to be educated and shared with the researchers to confirm their acknowledgement and compliance as part of their research and studies evaluations, pre graduations with the selected academic degrees. Academic institutions establish policies to safeguard research integrity (Bell et al., 2022).

5.4 Data Protection Requirements

It is mandatory for researchers or groups of researchers to implement an appropriate measure to make sure to protect the confidential information that they are handling and to ensure a well-managed secure data management.

6. Practical Application to the Research Topic

The main purpose of this section is to demonstrate and explain how research ethics will be applied to the proposed MBA research entitled:

"Evaluating the Strategic Impact of IKTVA on Supply Chain Performance, Supplier Development, and Local Value Creation: Evidence from Saudi Aramco."

6.1 Research Population

This study is expected to collect data from many resources as mentioned below:

- Saudi Aramco employees
- IKTVA suppliers
- Procurement professionals
- Supply chain managers
- Manufacturing organizations operating within the Saudi industrial sector

Approximately between 150 to 200 respondents will be targeted and to ensure utilizing adequate statistical validity tools and measures.

6.2 Data Collection Method

The plan to collect data by using a well-structured questionnaire consists of both demographic questions and various statements measured by using a five-point Likert scale. All the participants will be voluntary. It will be assured that no respondent will be forced to participate. Participation will be entirely voluntary and based on informed consent principles (Saunders et al., 2023).

6.3 Informed Consent Procedure

We will make sure that prior to participation; respondents shall receive an explanation outlining:

- The purpose of the study
- The main objective of the research
- Measures used for confidentiality
- The expected time to complete the questionnaire
- His or her right to withdraw at any stage, with no force to complete

Sample consent statement:

“It is entirely voluntary to participate in this study. To guarantee confidentiality, all the information provided will be used only for academic purposes. It is totally acceptable for participants to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.” Participants must understand the purpose and nature of the study before agreeing to participate (World Medical Association, 2024).

6.4 Confidentiality Measures

To guarantee full protection of the respondents, the following shall be implemented:

- No collection for names
- No employees' ID numbers are requested
- Any company-sensitive information will not be published
- All the results shall be only reported in aggregated statistical form.
- All the raw data will remain confidential.

Maintaining confidentiality is essential when collecting organizational data (APA, 2020).

6.5 Data Security Procedures

All the research data will be only accessible by the researcher and or the academic supervisors once needed. Appropriate safeguards should be implemented to protect collected data from unauthorized access (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

6.6 Avoiding Research Bias

We shall implement the below-mentioned procedure to avoid bias:

- Wording questionnaire to be neutral
- Totally diverse respondents' groups
- To use objective statistical analysis
- Shall make sure to report both positive and negative outputs.
- To make sure to avoid selective reporting.

Researchers should employ objective procedures during data collection and analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020).

6.7 Potential Ethical Risks

This is to confirm that; there is minimal or no risk associated with this study.

Possible concerns might include:

- Confidentiality concerns
- Required time to complete the survey
- The participants are hesitant to discuss specific organization issues or problems.

To reduce any risk, we shall apply the survey through anonymity and totally voluntary participants.

6.8 Ethical Benefits of the Study

This study might contribute to:

- Effectively understanding IKTVA and to improve its adding value.
- To support supplier development initiatives.
- To improve and enhance the supply chain process.
- To increase and improve the visionary plans for local value creation,
- To fully understand and support Saudi 2030 vision objectives and initiatives.

As per that, the benefits clearly compensate for any minimal risks associated with participation. Ethical research contributes to organizational improvement and societal development (United Nations, 2024).

6.9 Ethical Considerations Specific to IKTVA Research

Since the proposed study highlighted on examining and evaluating the strategic impact of the In-Kingdom Total Value Add (IKTVA) practices and program on supply chain performance, that lead to supplier development, and creates a value add locally within the Saudi Aramco system, and as per the 2030 country vision. As this topic is important and sensitive, then multiple ethical considerations will require particular attention beyond any general principles which were discussed earlier.

For example, in this study, some participants might be currently employed by Saudi Aramco. Additionally, participants might be a collection of affiliated suppliers, contractors, or organizations who are participating in the IKTVA initiatives. As a result, they may keep knowledge of operational practices, the performance of the suppliers and the initiatives of localization. As per that, we must take extra care, to ensure that not commercially sensitive, proprietary, or confidential information is requested, asked for or disclosed and released during the research process.

Second, participants might have different opinions regarding how effective the IKTVA program is. Some might consider the program as highly beneficial and adding value, while the other parties, may identify and highlight areas where implementation and improvement is required, while challenges will need to be addressed and resolved. To maintain the objective of the study, it is important for the researcher to show all findings and outputs with honesty and accuracy, without being biased or favoring any positive or negative viewpoints. The final analysis should reflect all

the actual responses collected through the actual questionnaire rather than the expected feedback or results as per the researchers.

Third, to protect the reputation of the organization is very important ethically. As the study is solely for academic purposes, and not to evaluate specific organizations, departments, suppliers or individuals. As a result, all the findings will be reported in aggregated form, and no company, organizational unit or group of people shall be identified.

Fourth, it is fully voluntary to participate in the study, without forcing anybody, or group of people to participate, if they did not like to. Furthermore, all the respondents have the freedom to decline participation or to withdraw from the study at any stage and without consequences. Additionally, no incentives either directly or indirectly will be used to influence participation.

Finally, it is very important for the researchers to maintain full transparency, non-involvement and professional integrity throughout all stages of the research process. By obeying to ethical standards, the study will generate a reliable output, which will develop and improve the academic knowledge while protecting the interests of participants, various organizations, department and stakeholders, involved in the IKTVA process, within Saudi Aramco system (Saunders et al., 2023; Walliman, 2021).

7. Conclusion

In scientific inquiry, and academic excellence, research ethics represent an essential component. To ensure the research is conducted both responsibly and professionally, ethical principles must be implemented, such as honesty, integrity, objectivity, confidentiality and informing consent.

The main purpose of this report is to examine the important rules of research ethics, by discussing the main ethical principles and challenges. Moreover, by reviewing relevant regulations and by demonstrating how the ethical standards will be implemented in the proposed MBA studying, the impact of IKTVA on supply chain performance and local value creating. All of that while improving the supplier mechanism and enhancing the localization content, adding value to the local strategy by localizing international investments in Saudi.

The report came to summarize that, by full adherence to research ethics, as an essential for producing trust, reliable and valuable research outcomes, that can contribute positively to

academic knowledge, enhance organizational development and improve and help society to become better and sustainable. Adherence to research ethics remains essential for ensuring research quality, credibility, and societal value (Resnik, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

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