

Professional Ethics of Industrial and Organisational Psychologists in Aotearoa New Zealand

Shane Pond¹, Joana Kuntz¹, and Carolyn Mason²

¹ School of Psychology, Speech and Hearing, University of Canterbury

² Philosophy Department, University of Canterbury

The New Zealand Psychological Society's Code of Ethics guides the ethical practice of all registered psychologists working in New Zealand. Yet, emerging research suggests that the availability of a general code of ethics may fail to adequately support psychologists practicing in non-clinical domains, including Industrial/Organisational (IO) psychologists. Our study relied on 12 structured interviews with registered IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand to explore the main ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in the profession, and their views about the Code's ability to guide their practice. Findings from our thematic analysis show that IO-trained psychologists believe the Code offers limited and at times ambiguous direction for ethical decision-making and may contribute to sustaining blurred boundaries across scopes of practice. We discuss the contribution of our findings to a wider debate about the unification of the psychology profession and differentiation across domains of practice.

Key words: *IO psychology, Ethical decision-making, Code of ethics, New Zealand, Qualitative.*

INTRODUCTION

Together with the New Zealand Psychologists Board and the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists, the New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPS) has developed an ethics code of conduct for all registered psychologists in the country (henceforth labelled "the Code"; New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002). The Code highlights three purposes: (1) to unify the profession, (2) to guide psychologists in ethical decision-making, and (3) to present a set of guidelines that might be available to the public in order to inform them of the professional ethics of the profession. Similar codes for the psychology profession are found in other countries, including the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia (Sinclair, 2020).

Professional ethics codes specify expected behaviours within a given profession, guide appropriate action towards stakeholders, and provide the foundation for public trust (Banks et al., 2022; Lefkowitz, 2003). In the absence of a suitable code of ethics, a professional may rely on their own judgment to resolve ethical issues, which is not grounded in any publicly or professionally recognized set of standards. Even if an ethics code is available, it may fail to provide suitable guidance on the ethical issues unique to an occupational context, rendering practitioners susceptible to engaging in unethical conduct.

Scholars in the United States have recently carried out extensive research on the American Psychological Association (APA) code's utility to Industrial and Organisational (IO) psychologists, the researchers concluded that the APA code does not offer adequate support for these practitioners given the distinct ethical dilemmas that characterise the profession (e.g., Lefkowitz & Watts, 2022; Lowman, 2021; Stone et al., 2021). Though no research was identified that examines Canadian IO psychologists' views on the utility of the

Canadian Code to inform their professional practice, its current edition offers practicing psychologists an ethical decision-making model and emphasises its applicability across domains of practice (Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), 2017, Sinclair, 2020). Given that the New Zealand Code draws on both the APA and CPA codes, there is need for evidence-based research that captures registered psychologists' views of the Code and its utility in guiding their professional practice. This study qualitatively examines the ethical issues and dilemmas encountered by registered IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand, how these professionals address ethical situations, and the extent to which they rely on the Code.

The Code for New Zealand Psychologists

The Code was originally developed in 1986 and adapted from codes developed by the psychological societies in the UK, Australia, Canada, and the United States (Fitzgerald, 2021). While the most recent version of the Code considers indigenous rights and obligations to Tangata Whenua (Fitzgerald, 2021) and includes an ethical decision-making model that can be applied in IO psychology practice (Sachdev & Koreshi, 2021), its principles and guidelines are aligned with other international codes of ethics for psychologists. As a result, the Code evinces similar limitations to those identified in international ethics codes for psychologists, namely a lack of ethical guidance for professional relationships of a commercial nature, and disparate utility across domains of practice (Sinclair, 2020). Researchers in New Zealand have previously remarked that the Code was not designed for "psychologists working in services managed in such a way, where profit motive becomes part of one's working life" (Seymour & Nairn, 2012, pp. 419). Although this limitation concerned psychologists working within the criminal justice system following the privatization of

prisons, which rendered these institutions a profit-based service, it is arguably pertinent to all psychologists working in environments where profit motive is central to practice (e.g., IO psychologists).

IO psychologists work with organisations, including for-profit businesses, either as employees or as external consultants. They focus on supporting the wellbeing and performance of workers while serving the interests of the client organisation. This occupational focus, specifically the balance between employee and business needs, uniquely shapes the ethical issues and dilemmas that IO psychologists face (Lefkowitz & Watts, 2022; Watts et al. 2023). Although the Code is currently in review to focus on ethical colonization, ethics and legislation, ethics and regulation, ethical decision-making, and changing work practices (Fitzgerald, 2021), its ability to serve all psychologists, including psychologists working in non-clinical contexts, has not been identified as a consideration for the review. Next, we outline the purposes of the Code and discuss evidence of the Code's ability to achieve its purposes across domains of practice.

The Purposes of the Code

Purpose 1: To unify the practices of the profession.

Psychology is a diverse field that comprises different areas of practice. Consequently, the unification aim underlying the first purpose of the Code could have two unintended upshots: 1) obscure important distinctions across professional contexts and focal areas of intervention in psychology, and 2) undercut the Code's ability to support all psychologists to act ethically in their respective professional areas.

The inability to distinguish across areas of practice in psychology can lead to ethical and even legal issues. IO-trained psychologists understand worker behaviours and performance on the backdrop of functional, structural, and socio-cultural environments. Throughout their postgraduate studies, they develop evidence-based knowledge of how organisational structures, leadership, technology systems, and other contextual factors affect, and are influenced by, workers and teams, and how to mitigate psychosocial risk factors in the workplace. In contrast, clinical psychologists are trained in mental health diagnosis and treatment. Although all registered psychologists must demonstrate a set of shared competencies under the general scope, the curricula of postgraduate professional programmes reflect the distinct knowledge foundations and professional competencies required across the different areas of practice. For instance, professional programs in IO psychology cover topics such as ethical considerations in consultancy contracts, the implications of job design for performance and wellbeing, or labour laws in the context of selection and compensation systems. The New Zealand Psychologists Board outlines well-defined scopes of practice and qualification requirements for clinical, counselling, and even educational psychologists, which set clear boundaries that preclude general scope psychologists (including IO) from practicing in a clinical capacity (New Zealand Psychologists Board, nd.). However, neither the Code nor the information available from the Board invite reflection about the ethical implications of working under the general scope but

without specialised professional training in each area of psychology. Hence, a clinical psychologist can offer IO-related services, in disregard of the specialised capabilities expected of professionals with an IO psychology background.

Attempts to unify the practices of the profession can also lead to the Code being too generic to suitably guide ethical conduct across the different domains of practice, or too clinically oriented to serve psychologists in non-clinical domains. Consider again the contrast between Clinical and IO psychology. While all psychologists registered with the Board operate under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act, clinical psychologists provide mental health services to, primarily, clinical populations, whereas IO-trained psychologists offer consulting services that target employee and organisational capability development, performance, and wellbeing (Aguinis et al., 2014; Islam & Schmidt, 2019). Given the disparate (practical) frameworks under which psychologists across domains of practice operate, the Code may be either too broad to effectively serve all psychologists or be distinctly more relevant to clinical psychologists, as its foundations draw on medical ethics and clinical practice principles. Thus, it is important to examine views of the Code among IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand and the corollaries of an aspirational unification purpose.

Purpose 2: To guide psychologists' ethical decision-making. The Code's second purpose is to support psychologists by guiding their ethical decision-making. Scholars have remarked that the ethical challenges faced by IO psychologists are unique given their occupational context and should be better understood (Lefkowitz, 2012, 2021; Lefkowitz & Watts, 2022; Lowman, 2021; Stone et al., 2021), and that general psychology ethics codes do not suitably support IO psychologists (Sinclair, 2020; Watts et al., 2023). Research conducted in the US suggests that the APA ethics code offers inadequate direction in areas such as 'assessments in organisations', 'data management', and 'professional interactions' (Watts et al., 2023). For instance, IO psychologists are often exposed to complex professional interactions involving managers, employees, and colleagues from different fields. Importantly, the psychologist performs multiple roles simultaneously and each role reflects a set of duties to a given stakeholder group. Watts et al. (2023) contend that the APA ethics code does not offer adequate direction on how to address the conflicts of interest that arise when IO psychologists have a duty to serve the interests of different stakeholder groups (e.g., employees, organisation). Conflict of interest and coercion represent the ethical dilemmas most frequently faced by IO psychologists, both of which are linked to multiple stakeholder relationships (Lefkowitz & Watts, 2022). An example of coercion involves the IO psychologist being pressured by a senior member of the organisation to divulge confidential information regarding an employee or employee group, alleging business necessity and specifying that the continuity of the psychologist's employment with the organisation is contingent on disclosing the information requested.

This tension between the duty to serve both employee and corporate interests, dubbed the "IO psychology

dilemma” (Blacksmith & Schmittzehe, 2023), reflects a foundational and domain-specific ethical entanglement that requires adequate support and oversight. In New Zealand, the Code suggests that conflicts of interest should be avoided or managed (p. 24 & 25) but offers little information that elucidates the ethical implications of managing complex stakeholder relationships. This exemplifies a potential deficiency in the Code and highlights the need to explore how IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand appraise the Code's ability to guide decision-making through dilemmas that are specific to their occupational contexts.

Purpose 3: To present a set of guidelines that might be available to the public in order to inform them of the professional ethics of the profession. The third purpose of the Code is to define ethical guidelines for the psychology profession and to communicate them to the public. This purpose assumes that the Code's guidelines are relevant across domains of practice, representative of an overarching psychology profession, and therefore adequately inform the public of what a psychologist ought to do. However, the discussion of potential limitations of purposes 1 and 2 suggests that the Code may not adequately reflect the professional ethics of psychologists in non-clinical domains. Previous research conducted in New Zealand indicates a lack of public understanding of what IO-trained psychologists do; the profession is often unknown or mistaken for counselling (Cooper-Thomas & Wright, 2008). If the public, including organisations, fail to understand what IO psychologists do, it stands to reason that they will not understand what IO psychologists ought to do ethically. Recent research indicates that a lack of public knowledge of what IO psychologists do and what they are ethically bound to do exacerbates identity tensions within the profession (Blacksmith & Schmittzehe, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of exploring how IO-trained psychologists interact with different stakeholder groups, particularly when ethical issues arise, and their views on the support provided by the Code to guide these interactions.

METHOD

Methodological Framework

Due to the limited information available in the literature, namely in a New Zealand context, we elected to carry out a qualitative investigation of how IO-trained psychologists experience ethical issues and dilemmas in their profession, and the perceived utility of the Code to support ethical conduct. This research aligns with a contextualist epistemological framework as it considers the influence of cultural context as the backdrop to knowledge and knowledge generation. Further, the study was conducted through the lens of a critical realist ontology; the understanding that lived experiences and views of reality unfold in specific social conditions and contexts (Park & Peter, 2022). Our interviews explored the lived experiences of IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand, the ethical issues they encounter, and how the Code informs and supports their professional practice (see sample interview questions in Appendix 1).

Participants and Procedure

Eligible participants for this study were registered psychologists practicing IO psychology. Given the small

number of IO-trained psychologists practicing in New Zealand (about 80), this study employed a snowball convenience sampling approach to recruit participants (Emerson, 2015). In the first instance, an advert for this study was posted on the Aotearoa Institute of Organisational Psychology LinkedIn page and disseminated to the first author's professional network via email. Prospective participants were also encouraged to reach out to their networks and distribute information about the study. Care was taken to secure a sample that was representative across demographic (e.g., gender) and occupational variables (e.g., affiliated to an organisation vs. external consultant). A total of 12 psychologists were interviewed for this study, seven were women, nine worked as independent consultants, and all had been registered psychologists for over 10 years.

Approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the researchers' university. Information about study aims and procedure was shared with eligible psychologists who expressed interest in participating. A consent form was then emailed to prospective participants, who were asked to carefully read the documents, return the signed consent form if they agreed to be interviewed, and arrange a time to be interviewed.

The interviews were conducted online by one member of the research team, recorded using the Zoom record feature, and transcribed through Otter.ai. At the start of each interview, the researcher developed rapport with the participants, reiterated their appreciation for the participants' time and willingness to be involved in the study, and requested that participants gave verbal confirmation that they agreed to be recorded. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to minimise researcher bias, while also allowing follow-up questions (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). At the end of the interview, the participants were asked if they would like to review a copy of the transcript prior to analysis. While the study generated interest among practitioners, data collection was completed after the 12th interview, as saturation was achieved at the 10th interview and no new themes emerged from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a useful approach to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data and was therefore selected as the analytical approach to investigate participants' experiences of ethical issues in their profession (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Nowell et al., 2017). We followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2023). While these steps are set out in a linear fashion, iterative transitions between steps occurred due to the recursiveness of thematic analysis. The first step – familiarisation with the data – was carried out by the team member responsible for conducting the interviews, who reviewed the initial transcriptions produced by Otter.ai and checked them against the audio data available from the Zoom recordings. This step allowed for the correction of errors and omissions detected in the transcriptions provided by the software. It also ensured that participant tone and other non-verbal cues were adequately coded. Printed notes of the transcripts were produced to highlight

potential codes ahead of step two (i.e., generating initial codes from the data). During this step, the researcher assigned a word or brief label to participants' statements that conveyed a given meaning, consistent with the scope of the study. The coding process also strived to map codes onto interview topics and questions (e.g., codes that reflected participants' experiences with ethical dilemmas in the IO profession).

Steps three and four – organising codes into themes and reviewing and refining themes – were carried out in an iterative manner to ensure the themes generated were as true to the source data as possible, and that they reliably reflected the topic areas covered in the interview. Once the themes were generated, they were reviewed by the researchers for internal homogeneity (i.e., the subthemes and codes accurately reflect a single overarching theme) and external heterogeneity (i.e., each theme is distinct from other themes). The themes were then contrasted with the coded data extracts to ensure the codes were accurately reflected in the themes. During this step, data extracts were reviewed by the researchers, who, in addition to the semantic analysis of statements, also attended to the latent meanings underlying the participants' responses.

A total of 88 codes were extracted from the interviews and represent two overarching themes: 'motivation and identity' and 'ethics in the IO profession'. The first theme comprises the subthemes 'career in IO psychology', 'motivation to register', and 'relationship tensions', while the second theme includes the subthemes 'experiencing ethical dilemmas' and 'managing ethical dilemmas'.

ANALYSIS

Motivation and Identity

Career in IO psychology

The data revealed that the pursuit of a career in IO psychology followed two trajectories. The first was framed as "falling into the IO profession" while practicing in an adjacent field, and the second reflected a shift in vocational interest from clinical psychology to IO psychology. Regarding the former, several interviewees remarked that they trained and began their career in human resources or business management, and later discovered IO psychology:

Emily: My first proper job as a recruitment consultant ... I sometimes refer to myself as an accidental psychologist. I didn't really mean for that to happen."

The second trajectory reiterates the low visibility of IO psychology and salience of clinical psychology in tertiary education. Our interviewees noted that they began studying psychology to become clinicians, and stumbled upon IO psychology, inadvertently, at the later stages of their undergraduate studies:

Sophia: I really started off like a lot of IO Psychs wanting to be a clinical psych (...) I did one organisational psych paper and I really liked it. So then I got into it through that and sort of got a job in it, and then never looked back (...) I found that I loved it kind of by accident.

Motivation to Register

The data indicates that the decision to become a registered psychologist stemmed from three sources:

registration as an entry requirement into an industry or organisation, peer encouragement, and desire for credibility. For many of our interviewees, the decision to join the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) as a psychologist was the impetus for registration, at times reinforced by academics and other registered practitioners:

Isabella: I got selected into the Navy, which is a really good path to registration. Once I finished my Masters at [university], I joined the Navy and got registered through them.

Noah: [The advice received from a lecturer was] if you want to get the best possible training as an IO psychologist, join the military, so I joined the Navy as an organisational psychologist to get my registration."

Several participants indicated that their decision to become a registered psychologist was informed by conversations with trusted peers or managers who were registered themselves:

Aidan: I probably followed my peers [to get registered] really, rather than making a deliberate decision.

Emily: My boss told me I should [get registered].

Finally, the participants conveyed a sense of pride in being called a psychologist. The interviewees who identified credibility as a reason to get registered remarked that the psychologist title set them apart from non-registered IO consultants, appealed to some clients, and as a result they experienced greater professional recognition.

Sophia: It just felt like something that I really wanted to do to be able to provide the value that I wanted to as a psychologist and be able to (...) say that and operate in that full capacity.

While a few participants recognised the didactic benefits associated with the registration process (e.g. *Olivia: I really loved the doing the diploma, I got a lot out of it*), many of our interviewees, registered psychologists for over a decade, perceived little value in being registered. One key reason, discussed ahead, is the lack of professional development opportunities relevant to IO psychology practice. The other is that, with notable exceptions (e.g., military psychologist), registration is not a requirement to practice IO psychology.

Noah: As a registered psychologist you get the title... But if I look back on it now, in hindsight, I am less convinced of the benefit and merit [of being registered].

Relationship Tensions

The interviewee's accounts of their experiences as IO-trained psychologists highlighted several relationship tensions that affect their professional identity, namely the relationship with the NZPsS, with organisations and clients, and with clinical psychologists.

Relationship with the NZPsS. Many participants remarked on the discrepancy between their commitment to upholding high professional standards and the limited developmental support provided by the NZPsS:

Sophia: A lot of the professional learning things

that are on there, they're all clinical psych tailored or focused. So I think sometimes it's frustrating to (...) get that information or get the continued competence that you need, because you can't just get it through that forum.

The perceived lack of professional development opportunities relevant to IO psychology led some of the interviewees to question the value of registration, their identity and status as psychologists, and to experience an ongoing unease at the training and support provided:

Mason: I think everything New Zealand psych board does is not that fit for purpose for IO psychs (...) It's always been awkward, you know, right through from going through registration and learning about it to practicing as a practitioner to supervising others. It's awkward, it doesn't fit that well. And it would be great to have something that did.

Several participants linked the tensions experienced in relation to the NZPsS with their views of the Code. The Code was characterised as being too vague and removed from the reality and exigencies of the IO psychology profession to offer any substantial guidance:

Ethan: Clarity on or guidance on what "good" looks like [is something I would want to support my ethical decision making].

Relationship with organisations and clients. Although IO-trained psychologists are sought after and feel recognised by their expertise and the work they conduct with organisations, they often find themselves explaining what they do. The interviewees commented that they are often mistaken for clinical or counselling professionals and asked to provide mental health support to workers. Several also remarked that because the general public's understanding of 'psychologist' is someone who engages with clinical practice, they intentionally adopt the title of consultants instead of organisational psychologists:

Mia: People see you as a psychologist, they don't see you as an organisational psychologist. It's inevitable, at some stage during your career, you're going to have someone wind up in your office who's looking for support.

The lack of clarity around what an IO psychologist is and what they do is aggravated by the fact that IO psychology encompasses multiple areas of intervention despite representing a small area of practice, which the interviewees identified as a challenge to offering a precise description of the profession that can be clearly communicated to organisations:

Noah: [IO psychology as a subject], so broad and general. I guess that's the other challenge because there's no real specialization even within IO psychology.

Relationship with clinical psychologists. Several interviewees discussed tensions arising from the perception of blurred professional boundaries and double standards in practice requirements. A few remarked that some clinical psychologists practice IO psychology without specialised training or IO-specific academic qualifications.

Olivia: Interestingly, a lot of clinical psychs go and practice IO Psych. After they, I don't know, sick of doing clinical or whatever (...) as far as I know, with no additional training.

While the participants were clear about why IO-trained psychologists, under the general scope, cannot work as clinical psychologists, they also conveyed frustration and concern about the lack of ethical clarity and what they view as grey areas between the clinical and general scopes. For example, one interviewee trained in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was unsure as to whether they were allowed to apply this tool in their coaching practice with organisations.

Ethics in the IO Profession

Experiencing Ethical Dilemmas

The data revealed two interconnected categories of ethical dilemmas experienced in the IO profession: competing obligations and power dynamics.

Competing obligations. Several participants commented on the tensions arising from their ethical obligations to different stakeholder groups. At times they are hired to manage a redundancy process and faced with the tension between their ethical obligation to reduce or eliminate harm to employees and the ethical obligation to protect the financial interests of the organisation, and by extension protect the livelihood of the remaining employees.

Several participants had also experienced pressure from managers to release confidential employee information gathered from surveys or interviews. Even if the managers' request is grounded on well-meaning intentions to redress the issues identified in the data, the psychologists are conflicted between their obligation to serve the client organisation and their obligation to protect the employees' confidentiality.

Ethan: [When using a psychometric tool] there can be pressure from other stakeholders; it could be people, leaders, or it could even be HR advisors, business partner [they] want to understand or, like drill down into responses.

In essence, IO-trained psychologists frequently encounter ethical dilemmas arising from the need to simultaneously protect employees (e.g., confidentiality), serve the client organisation (e.g., provision of business-relevant information), and balance those demands with personal interests (e.g., income or job security).

Power dynamics. The interviewees noted that managing power dynamics and the experience of coercion are part of the reality of working as an IO-trained psychologists. Many described situations where senior leaders exercised considerable pressure to engage in unethical behaviour, including confidentiality breaches. A few participants recounted experiences of coercion:

Liam: [Sharing confidential information is] not ethical. And the lawyer says, "you know, if you don't [tell them the confidential information], you are going to be charged". (...) And I refused. And he threatened to charge me,

Aiden: There's been times in terms of coercion (...) people wanting information about something where you haven't been given explicit permission

to release this to the organisation... that's kind of a tense relationship when the organisation is paying the bill but the coachee is the one you're trying to help change. So sometimes you have conflicting objectives. Keep the client happy but also to create a safe environment where the coachee tells you stuff, they need to tell you to be able to help them.

IO-trained psychologists also come upon ethical entanglements when they compete for contracts with non-registered practitioners or professionals who are not bound to a code of ethics (i.e., do not share their ethical obligations), and when they must work alongside these professionals:

Emily: (...) you will run into some of them have no idea of where the boundaries on these sorts of things might lie. They've had no training, and they might have been in the business for years. And they've always got away with it.

Several participants exhibited a sense of pride when they exercised their agency to uphold their ethical values:

Liam: One of the managers goes, "well, maybe we just don't use you anymore, if you're not good fit for purpose". And so we're like, "okay, well, (...) that's up to you, I'm not going to sacrifice my values, my standards, to be able to fulfil what you want".

Nevertheless, their position can be precarious, and asserting one's ethical stance may pose a threat to livelihood (e.g., *Aiden: Yes, so that's kind of a tense relationship when the organisation is paying the bill*). Some of the participants conveyed sadness and resignation when describing instances when they were unable to act in a manner consistent with the ethics of the profession because they were not in a position of power, and felt they had no formal support or recourse.

Managing Ethical Dilemmas

Further to the experience of ethical dilemmas in the IO profession, the interviewees were asked about their approaches to managing these dilemmas. The subthemes that emerged reflected reliance on a strong moral compass and on a peer supervision network.

Strong moral compass. Most of our participants commented on how their strong personal values and integrity guided their ethical decision-making. Some recognised that, throughout the registration process, the overarching ethical principles outlined in the Code were combined with their personal values, and strengthened the quality of ethical decisions:

Noah: You might not necessarily know exactly what part of the Code is or what you need to do, but it gives you that hang on, I'm sure somewhere in the back of my brain, this scenario doesn't feel quite right to me.

In instances where the Code fails to offer clear guidance applicable to a business context, the participants draw on their moral compass to guide ethical decisions:

Olivia: I think probably the best thing is to have your own really strong values, you know, compass. And that's what it comes down to. And I'll often say often to clients, "something about this doesn't feel

right. I can't identify it right now. I need to go away and think about it".

When that reflection proves insufficient, most opt to discuss the ethical issue with other IO-trained psychologists and incorporate different perspectives. It is noteworthy that despite the strong ethical stance demonstrated by the participants, none of them explicitly outlined their ethical boundaries and principles to current or prospective clients. When asked why they do not disclose their ethical boundaries, some interviewees stated that ethical concerns are addressed within the written contract with clients, and prospective clients are not motivated to discuss these matters (e.g., *Emily: For most of my customers, [clarifying ethical principles is] irrelevant. They aren't interested*). Others assume that their ethical standards are implicitly understood through their professional title and reputation.

Peer supervision networks. Most of the psychologists interviewed relied on peer supervision networks to check their biases and gather different perspectives on ethically challenging situations. Without exception, formal supervision and peer networks were discussed with fondness and indicated the presence of a strong and supportive professional community in New Zealand:

Sophia: We've got a peer supervision network (...) 10 of us psychologists who work around different sort of like sort of in house or consulting ones are like all sorts of different people with different experience. So if I get like quite a meaty one that I don't know what to do about, I'll take it to that group, and sort of talk that through.

Emily: I've always had usually more than one professional supervisor. Supervision for org psychs is quite different to supervision for clin psychs. Clin psychs use supervision for effectiveness purposes. We must also, but we need to use [supervision] for risk management as well.

When enquired about other ways IO-trained psychologists can be supported to act ethically, one participant recommended that a hotline run by the NZPSS would provide welcome guidance in the resolution of ethical dilemmas:

Noah: It might be nice to have an anonymous (...) helpline to the Psych board (...) someone on there who you could contact and explain that ethical dilemma to. (...) just have someone who you can ring up and say, "this is what I'm facing" and then they can in a non-judgmental way help guide you and provide advice, which is not necessarily your supervisor or your peer group, but actually a registered body that can provide that advice.

The participants did not suggest that IO psychology needed its own code of ethical conduct. However, several participants mentioned that an appendix to the Code might elucidate what is expected of IO-trained psychologists and support their professional practice:

Aiden: Having a single ethical code but then having appendices or examples for each technical area, which sort of help people apply those ethical principles to their own particular practice.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to an emerging literature that explores the unique ethical issues and dilemmas experienced by IO psychologists and the application of a general code of ethics to all psychologists (e.g., Banks et al., 2022; Lefkowitz, 2021; Lefkowitz & Watts, 2022; Sinclair, 2020; Watts et al., 2023), extending this enquiry to New Zealand. Further to the identification of the most common ethical issues encountered by IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand and how these issues were managed, the findings offer important insights into their professional experiences. Our results revealed how career trajectories, perceptions of registration value, and relationships with the NZPS, organisations, and other psychologists signal enduring tensions in the profession. IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand view the Code as a) buttressing the primacy of clinical psychology to the detriment of other areas of practice, and in doing so introducing ambiguity about what psychologists do, and b) offering poor guidance to navigate the ethical issues unique to the IO psychology profession. Next, we discuss these two overarching conclusions in relation to the three purposes of the Code.

Low visibility and blurred professional boundaries

Our findings suggest that the Code's purpose to unify the practices of the profession (purpose 1) may contribute to an enduring lack of clarity about what psychologists across the different areas of practice do, and that the aim to ensure public awareness of the ethics of the psychology profession (purpose 3) remains unfulfilled for IO-trained psychologists. Evidence of these issues can be found in the subthemes underlying the 'motivation and identity' theme.

First, none of our interviewees commenced their university studies with the intent to train and work in the field of IO psychology, and almost all wanted to become clinical psychologists. Most became aware of IO psychology and found the motivation to pursue a career in the field only after they enrolled in an IO paper towards the end of their undergraduate degree. The findings suggest that the public have limited knowledge of what IO psychology is and what IO-trained psychologists do, and that psychology education in New Zealand remains, for the most part, clinically focused. In relation to purpose 3, should an organisational representative consult the Code to understand what an IO psychologist is and how they are expected to navigate dilemmas involving obligations to multiple stakeholders, they will gain no useful insights, and the ethics of the (IO) profession remain opaque.

Second, registration is a requirement to practice clinical psychology, but, with notable exceptions, it is optional for a professional qualified in, and practicing, IO psychology. Once registered, IO-trained psychologists find that the specialised training available from the NZPS to develop area-specific competencies and knowledge is scarce, and that much of what is on offer is clinically oriented. Some participants conveyed that the Code is similarly skewed to guide the ethical practice of professionals operating within the clinical scope. These factors account for the low perceived value in being registered conveyed by several participants.

Third, many interviewees remarked on the professional practice challenges arising from the low visibility of IO psychology and primacy of clinical psychology, namely in client interactions and relationships with their clinical peers. The psychologists interviewed experienced the engulfment of their smaller area of practice by the larger, publicly recognised, clinical domain. This was evidenced by multiple accounts of client organisations expecting IO-trained psychologists to provide mental health support to the workforce. As a result, many practitioners said they forfeited their "psychologist" title in favour of "consultant" to ensure differentiation from clinical psychologists. The ongoing need to assert distinction from the clinical domain was discussed by the interviewees as detrimentally affecting their sense of professional identity and interface with client organisations. In relation to the Code, these findings suggest that although the unification of the psychology profession does not preclude differentiation across the domains of practice (Sinclair, 2020), the participants noted that there seems to be a singular public understanding of psychology in New Zealand as clinically focused psychology.

Another challenge for IO-trained psychologists concerned the blurred lines across areas of practice. Although our participants were clear about formal scopes of practice and the importance of obtaining specialised qualifications, they noted that some clinical psychologists work as IO practitioners without specialised training or qualifications. Furthermore, several interviewees conveyed apprehension about overstepping the bounds of the general scope when they are trained in a clinical tool to apply in IO practice and noted a lack of ethical guidance in this regard. Research shows that lack of clarity about the boundaries of one's role increases the susceptibility to engage in unethical behaviour by accident (Fagbenro, 2019). Hence, attempts to unify the practices of the psychology profession under an ethics code may create role ambiguity that could lead psychologists to inadvertently act unethically.

Poor ethical guidance

The subthemes and categories identified under the theme 'ethics in the profession', along with the discussion of relationship tensions, suggest that the Code may be falling short of fulfilling its second purpose for IO-trained psychologists: to guide psychologists' ethical decision-making. The interviewees did not feel appropriately supported to navigate the ethical issues and dilemmas they encounter in IO practice. Our results echo findings from the international research, which suggests that the broad recommendations outlined in the ethics code for psychologists does not adequately meet the needs of IO psychologists (Sinclair, 2020; Watts et al., 2023).

In our study, the participants discussed how the Code provides only vague direction or inadequate support to address the most common ethical dilemmas: competing ethical obligations to multiple stakeholder groups, and the power dynamics that often place these professionals on the receiving end of coercion. Regarding the dilemmas that arise from competing obligations, some interviewees discussed the pressure to disclose information about employee groups or coaching clients to the contracting manager. Even in instances when the manager's intentions

were benign, the disclosure of information conflicted with the psychologists' duty to uphold the employees' right to confidentiality. Although the Code highlights a person's right to confidentiality and privacy, it also stresses the moral obligation to provide a high level of professional service to the client (organisation). This creates a competing ethical obligation as the IO-trained psychologists cannot both protect the confidentiality of the employee and meet their ethical obligations of professional service to the organisation. The Code does not offer guidance on how to address dilemmas pertaining to the management of multiple stakeholders, and to stakeholder management in commercial relationships.

With respect to the ethical dilemmas arising from managing power dynamics, the participants discussed having their professional recommendations overridden by senior managers or colleagues (not psychologists) who then engage in unethical decisions on behalf of the working group. They also described feeling pressured to compromise their ethical standards to maintain or secure employment. The episodes recounted throughout the interviews underscore the pervasiveness of ethical dilemmas for IO-trained psychologists that involve power imbalances and working with people who do not share their ethical obligations. In the literature, these dynamics are characterised as organisation-professional conflict, where professionals may feel forced to sacrifice their ethical standards to support the achievement of organisational goals (Barrainkua & Espinosa-Pike, 2020; Shafer, 2002, 2009), and reflects the IO psychology dilemma outlined earlier (Blacksmith & Schmittzehe, 2023).

The Code does not provide guidance on how to manage organisation-professional conflict, nor does it indicate who to seek support from to alleviate the pressure this conflict poses. Section 4.4.6 (p. 29) of the Code states: "Psychologists enter only into those agreements or contracts that allow them to act in accordance with the ethical principles and standards of this Code". This implies that IO-trained psychologists should not enter working relationships with organisations unless they can guarantee that all organisational stakeholders will allow them to act ethically. The challenge is that a psychologist cannot guarantee the ethical conduct of non-registered colleagues, nor can they expect that the organisation will forgo its business interests and ensure that psychologists abide by the ethical obligations outlined in the Code.

Almost all participants relied on some method of supervision to inform their ethical decisions. From the interviews, we discerned two reasons for sharing ethical issues with supervisors and peers: to check one's biases and ethical reasoning, and to manage risk. While the first reason is arguably common among psychologists across areas of practice, the risk management rationale for engaging with supervision networks suggests a degree of uncertainty around appropriate ethical conduct and lack of guidelines – in the Code – that suitably guide IO professionals to navigate ethical dilemmas.

We introduce a caveat to the claim that the Code fails to fulfil its second purpose. Several interviewees discussed their familiarity with the Code's principles and how they relied on its guidelines to shape their moral compass. Even if the Code was not used directly to steer ethical decision-

making, it informed the interviewees' professional standards, which in turn guided ethical decisions. Hence, while the Code does not offer ethical guidance specific to IO psychology, it encourages reflection about the ethical ramifications of in professional scenarios.

Implications for research and practice

This study contributes to our growing understanding of how IO-trained psychologists in New Zealand experience and manage ethical situations, their perceived support for upholding the ethical standards of their profession, and their professional identity. Dilemmas arising from managing multiple stakeholder groups and from power imbalances were commonly experienced by our interviewees, who lamented a lack of direction from the Code to resolve the dilemmas. While both these findings align with research conducted among IO psychologists in the United States, more research is needed to verify them in other countries, and to identify whether and how these codes of ethics effectively guide IO psychologists.

Our findings also underscore the need for research into the development of professional identity among IO-trained psychologists, and the factors that contribute to or undermine their sense of identity beyond the IO psychology dilemma (Blacksmith & Schmittzehe, 2023). This study provides the groundwork for that investigation and reveals that the primacy of clinical psychology in the public eye, the limited professional development resources available to registered IO-trained psychologists, and ambiguity across psychology domains of practice constitute some of the main threats to IO practitioners' sense of professional identity. More research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these perceived threats, their impact on IO-trained psychologists' wellbeing and performance outcomes, and the factors that strengthen professional identity among practitioners within non-clinical domains in psychology.

Our results also indicate the need to inform the public more effectively about what IO psychologists do. For instance, ensuring greater exposure to IO psychology and other non-clinical psychology areas in secondary education would broaden the public's understanding of what psychologists (can) do and about the distinct areas of focus across domains of practice. Greater public awareness of IO psychology would subsequently encourage organisational representatives to seek the expertise of IO practitioners for non-clinical interventions, which would bolster the contribution of IO practitioners to New Zealand organisations. If the business community has a shared understanding of what IO-trained psychologists do, it may also have a clearer grasp of how IO-trained psychologists ought to conduct themselves. We expect that misconceptions that foment some of the ethical dilemmas encountered by IO professionals can be mitigated by increased familiarity with the profession (Thai & Lumbreras, 2023). The success of such public education efforts is predicated on the Code being regularly revised to reflect the current and emerging ethical obligations of IO-trained psychologists (Rauvola & Reddy, 2023). Also, the utility of the Code can be enhanced through sustained involvement of IO-trained psychologists in consultation processes ahead of these revisions (Knapp et al., 2020). Finally, our study's

examination of New Zealand IO-trained psychologists' lived experiences should spark discussion among our governing bodies on mechanisms to enhance support for ethical practice in the profession.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, while our sample of 12 interviewees represents about 15% of New Zealand's registered IO-trained psychologists, the findings may offer a slanted portrayal of IO practitioners' views of the Code and ethical issues in the profession. For instance, all participants had been practicing IO psychology for more than 10 years, so the results may not reflect the experiences of early career professionals. Nevertheless, we reached data saturation at the 10th interview, so the perspectives presented here are representative of mid- to late-career IO-trained psychologists. The qualitative approach enabled us to gather in-depth information from the interviewees and provide the groundwork for future research that could rely on surveys involving a combination of quantitative items and qualitative fields to verify and extend the findings in a larger sample of registered IO professionals.

References

- Aguinis H., Bradley, K., & Brodersen, A. (2014). Industrial–Organizational Psychologists in Business Schools: Brain Drain or Eye Opener? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 7(3), 284–303.
- Banks, G. C., Knapp, D. J., Lin, L., Sanders, C. S., & Grand, J. A. (2022). Ethical decision making in the 21st century: A useful framework for industrial-organizational psychologists. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, 15(2), 220–235.
- Barrainkua, I. & Espinosa-Pike, M. (2020). Antecedents of organisational professional conflict faced by professional accountants in different work settings. *Revista Brasileira De Gestão De Negócios*, 22(3), 686–704.
- Barrett D., & Twycross, A. (2018). Data collection in qualitative research. *Evidence-based Nursing*, 21(3), 63–64.
- Barnett, J. E., Behnke, S. H., Rosenthal, S. L., & Koocher, G. P. (2007). In case of ethical dilemma, break glass: Commentary on ethical decision making in practice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 38(1), 7–12.
- Bergen N., & Labonté, R. (2020). “Everything is perfect, and we have no problems”: Detecting and limiting social desirability bias in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 30(5), 783–792.
- Blacksmith, N., & Schmittzehe, T. (2023). We can be more, but first, who are we? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 16(4), 520–523.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Thematic analysis. In H.Cooper, M.N.Coutanche, L.M.McMullen, A.T.Panter, D.Rinskopf, & K.J.Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological.*, Vol. 2, 2nd ed. (pp. 65–81). American Psychological Association.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0000319-004>
- Canadian Psychological Association. (2017). *Canadian code of ethics for psychologists* (4th ed.). Retrieved from <https://cpa.ca/aboutcpa/committees/ethics/codeofethics/>
- New Zealand Psychological Society. (2002). *Code of ethics for psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychology.org.nz/journal-archive/code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Cooper-Thomas H. D., & Wright, S. (2008). Industrial–Organisational psychology in New Zealand: Who are we and where are we going? *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Organisational Psychology*, 1, 12–21.
- Emerson, R. W. (2015). Convenience sampling, random sampling, and snowball sampling: How does sampling affect the validity of research? *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(2), 164–168.
- Fagbenro, D. A. (2019). Role ambiguity and organizational justice as the predictors of unethical behavior among nurses. *Journal of Client-Centered Nursing Care*, 5(2), 81–86
- Fitzgerald, J. (2021). The code of ethics for psychologists working in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Parsonson, K.L. (Ed.), *Handbook of International Psychology Ethics: Codes and Commentary from Around the World* (1st ed.), (pp. 94–104), Routledge.
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408
- Islam S., & Schmidt, G. (2019). Getting in the game: I-O psychologists as debunkers and testers of business practice. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 12(3), 243–246
- Knapp, S., Gottlieb, M. C., & Handelsman, M. M. (2020). Empowering psychologists to evaluate revisions to the APA ethics code. *Ethics & Behavior*, 30(7), 533–542.
- Lefkowitz, J. (2003). *Ethics and values in industrial-organizational psychology* (1st ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lefkowitz, J. (2021). Forms of ethical dilemmas in industrial-organizational psychology. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 14(3), 297–319.

- Lefkowitz, J., & Watts, L. L. (2022). Ethical incidents reported by industrial-organizational psychologists: A ten-year follow-up. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 107*(10), 1781–1803.
- Lowman R. L. (2021). Uses and limitations of ethical dilemmas in understanding and applying ethics and values in industrial-organizational psychology. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 14*(3), 320–324.
- New Zealand Psychologists Board (nd.). Retrieved from <https://psychologistsboard.org.nz/want-to-register/scopes-of-practice/>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Park, L., & Peter, S. (2022). Application of critical realism in social work research: Methodological considerations. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review, 34*(2), 55–66.
- Rauvola, R. S., & Reddy, M. (2023). Improving conditions or conditional improvements? A modern code, and mode, of I-O ethics. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 16*(2), 174–178.
- Sachdev, A. R., & Koreshi, S. Y. (2021). Exploring the New Zealand's competence-based ethical training: Guidelines for I-O psychologists. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 14*(3), 340–344.
- Seymour, F., & Nairn, R. (2012). Aotearoa/New Zealand. In M. M. Leach, M. J. Stevens, G. Lindsay, A. Ferrero, & Y. Korkut (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of international psychological ethics* (pp. 405–423). Oxford University Press.
- Shafer, W. E. (2002). Ethical pressure, organizational-professional conflict, and related work outcomes among management accountants. *Journal of Business Ethics, 38*(3), 261–273.
- Shafer, W. E. (2009). Ethical climate, organizational-professional conflict and organizational commitment: A study of Chinese auditors. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 22*(7), 1087–110
- Sinclair, C. (2020). Developing and revising the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists: key differences from the American Psychological Association code. *Ethics & Behavior, 30*(4), 249–263.
- Stone, N. J., Kottke, J. L., & Shoenfelt, E. L. (2021). Ethics and I-O psychology: Do we just talk the talk or do we walk the walk? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 14*(3), 335–339.
- Thai, W., & Lumbreras, J. (2023). Moving beyond compliance to conventional wisdom: How I-O professionals can promote an ethical organizational culture. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 16*(2), 170–173.
- Watts, L. L., Lefkowitz, J., Gonzalez, M. F., & Nandi, S. (2023). How relevant is the APA ethics code to industrial-organizational psychology? Applicability, deficiencies, and recommendations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 16*(2), 143–165.

Corresponding Author:

Joana Kuntz

Email: joana.kuntz@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix 1

Interview Questions (examples)

- a) What was your motivation for getting registered as a psychologist?
- b) In your professional practice, when starting a working relationship with a client, how do you outline the principles of your ethical practice?
- c) Describe a time when you have experienced an ethical dilemma, take me through what happened, how did you address them?
- d) Were there any other forms of support you would like to have had available to address these dilemmas?
- e) What are your views of a single code of ethics that provides a set of guidelines for all domains of psychological practice?