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ABSTRACT

Problem, research strategy, and findings: We interviewed 61 practicing planners seeking deeper insights into what motivates their decisions and how they personally determine ethical behavior in the more contested and real-world situations they face. We asked how planners balance their own ethics, their individual take on professional planning ethics, their workplace cultures, and the specific principles embodied in professional codes. We combined these semistructured qualitative interviews with our prior survey results as part of a sequential mixed-methods research project to allow practitioners and academics to better understand the ethical bases of professional planning practice in the United States. Our interviewees confirmed most practicing planners regularly face ethical dilemmas in their professional practice. We find, in addition to the expected ethical dilemmas due to planners' commitments to both the scientific legitimacy of their technical analysis and the democratic legitimacy of political decision makers' implementation of those recommendations, most of our interviewees experienced ethical conflicts between their private ethics and those they use in their professional practice. Despite this ethical dissonance, their espoused behaviors were largely consistent with rule-based ethical frameworks, many of which are embedded in the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Though practicing planners felt the code was influential and useful, they also found it difficult to follow in practice. Finally, private-sector planners felt the code neglects to address the ethical concerns they face in practice.

Takeaways for practice: Professional planners use different ethical frameworks depending on the context of the ethical dilemma faced and their workplace culture. Professional planners struggle with emotional and ethical dissonance in their attempts to balance their private ethics, their workplace norms and culture, and their professional code of ethics. The AICP Code could benefit from a round of revisions focusing on how the code can help minimize this inherent dissonance. Finally, professional planners should practice resolving ethical conflicts between their private and professional ethical perspectives as well as those between the legitimacy of technical planning expertise and democratic decision making.

Keywords: AICP Code of Ethics, ethical dilemmas, ethical dissonance, ethical frameworks, planning practice

How do planners balance their own private ethics, their individual take on professional planning ethics, their workplace cultures, and the specific principles embodied in professional codes? To qualitatively understand the ethical practices of contemporary practicing planners in the United States, we conducted semistructured interviews as part of a sequential mixed-methods research project. We interviewed 61 of the same planners we surveyed previously (Lauria & Long, 2017), seeking deeper insights into what motivates their decisions and how they personally determine what is ethical behavior in the more contested and real-world situations they faced in practice.

We confirmed our assumption that most practicing planners regularly face ethical dilemmas in their professional practice. We also confirmed our suspicion that contemporary practicing planners have internalized much of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (American Planning Association [APA], 2016) and realize it influenced their decision making in ethically challenging situations. Most of our interviewees experienced conflicts between the ethical frameworks valued in their personal life and those required in their professional practice, in addition to the expected ethical conflicts due to planners' commitments to both the scientific legitimacy of their technical analysis (planning expertise) and the

democratic legitimacy of political decision makers' implementation of those recommendations. Finally, we find that private-sector planners and public-sector planners use slightly different ethical frameworks; private-sector planners in particular felt the AICP Code does not address the ethical concerns they face in practice.

In the following sections, we conceptually frame our analysis and interpretation of the interviews with a presentation of the extant literature on the ethical pressures practicing planners face, the value gap between planning education and professional practice, and the tensions between the domain ethics of spatial planning and contemporary workplace norms. Next, we explain our sequential mixed-methods research design and in-depth structured interview protocols, the characteristics of our interviewees, and our use of computer-aided qualitative analysis. We present our interpretation of the interview key findings: the espoused ethical frameworks of professional planners, the nature of the ethical dilemmas they faced, and their views of the AICP Code. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the costs of ethical dissonance. Finally, we recommend a round of discussions of AICP Code revisions that focus on how the code can help minimize this ethical dissonance and that professional planners should practice resolving ethical conflicts between their private and professional ethical perspectives as well as those between the legitimacy of technical planning expertise and democratic decision making. It is our hope that these results, in combination with our survey results, will allow practitioners and planning educators to better understand the ethical bases of contemporary professional planning practice in the United States.

Planners' Ethically Charged Contexts *Scientific Legitimacy in Political Democratic Conflict*

Marcuse (2014) argues there is tremendous evidence of conflicting outside pressures that contribute to determining a planner's use or nonuse of planning ethics. Howe and Kaufman (1979), Mayo (1982), and, later, Allmendinger (2009), Taşan-Kok (2012), and Lauria and Long (2017) expect the ethical conflicts central to planning practice to emanate from the role of expertise in planning analysis and recommendations (technical scientific legitimacy) and the role of plural politics in political decision making in implementing those recommendations (representative democratic legitimacy). Sager (2009) also observes an intensification of these cross-pressures that Nordic planners face in contemporary neoliberal political economy.

Penpecioglu and Taşan-Kok (2016) find, during their evaluation of the responses of young planners practicing in the mixed (political) economy of Turkey, extreme alienation from the professional values espoused in their planning education and the values expected in their professional practice. Later, Taşan-Kok et al. (2016) find similar pressures while interviewing young planners in the Netherlands (Korthals Altes & Taşan-Kok, 2018) on the challenges they faced in practice. These findings led Taşan-Kok and Oranje (2018) to commission worldwide research projects to evaluate young planners' attitudes in relation to the value-gap (here expressed as an ethical dissonance) between planning education and professional practice. This research resulted in wide-ranging international confirmations of similar pressures and feelings of alienation. In the same volume, Oranje, Venter, and Ferreira (2018) find that young planners in South Africa find it difficult to practice the "noble concerns" (p. 79) of planning and often risk their careers to do so or simply give up and work to earn a salary. Sykes (2018) finds that young British planners are often required to defend planning denials for which they had written positive technical evaluations and, at times, "do not feel they have the ability to say no to bad proposals" (p. 147). These value gaps between planning education and planning practice are reflective of the potentially contradictory democratic and scientific values embedded in professional planning practice.

Domain Ethics and Individual Ethics

Hoekveld and Needham (2013) argue for a "domain ethics" specific to spatial planning that incorporates the substantive values of the planning profession with procedures for developing and implementing spatial plans. They insist practicing planners need to create situation-specific ethical frames and use them to evaluate their planning strategies and alternative solutions. They develop a strong argument for the recognition of the necessary components of an ethical system concretely embedded in contemporary planning practice.

Hoekveld and Needham's (2013) spatial planning domain ethics require an individual's moral obligation to try "to ensure that the planning agency follows those ethical principles" (p. 1649). We contend this obligation to domain ethics is only one of the obligations that can generate ethical dilemmas faced by contemporary practicing planners. In addition, when an individual planner finds an ethical disjuncture between his or her understanding of planning's domain ethics and the ethical norms of their workplace's culture, cognitive and emotive dissonance is likely to bloom (see Mayo, 1982).

Howe and Kaufman's (1979) analysis suggests practicing planners in the 1970s were not often confronted with conflicts between their agency's ethical orientation and their individual take on professional ethics. Unfortunately, the aforementioned studies show this congruence in ethical norms is much less prevalent today.

AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Hoekveld and Needman's (2013) middle-range spatial planning domain ethics, which incorporates both the substantive values of the American planning profession and the procedures for developing and implementing plans, is effectively concretized in the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct as evidenced by Section B ("Our Rules of Conduct") of the code.

The AICP Code includes a combination of three forms of decision-making ethics: virtue ethics, deontic ethics, and utilitarian ethics (Lauria & Long, 2017). *Virtue ethics* are aspirational and can be found in Section A ("Principles of Which We Aspire") of the AICP Code. These principles focus on what planners should do to "strive for excellence . . ." and on doing what someone they respect would do (Wueste, 2005, p. 70). Virtue-based decisions give planners the appearance of having good character. *Deontic ethics* are based on an accepted set of normative rules. These set of rules are contained in Section B of the AICP Code.¹ These rules are to be followed regardless of the expected specific outcomes. Planners who follow these rules demonstrate they are good/ethical planners. *Utilitarian ethics* focus on the best outcome for the most people. A decision that maximizes (or protects) the public interest is the most intuitive example of a utilitarian-based decision. This example is embedded in the preamble and many of the substantive values expressed throughout the AICP Code. Finally, *hedonistic ethics*, or *ethical egoism*, although not represented in the AICP Code, provides a basis for individuals to act in their self-interest, ignoring the interests of others (Becker & Becker, 2001). Hedonistic behavior focuses solely on individual pleasure, an ethical framework embedded in the libertarian conception of a "good society," in which everyone operating in their own self-interest creates the maximum good in society. We include hedonistic ethics in our analysis to allow for counterfactual choices. Although these are philosophical definitions of ethical behaviors for our qualitative analysis, we are more concerned with the intuitive and complex pragmatic analogs to the ethical frameworks planners used in their private lives, their construction of a professional planning ethics, their workplace cultural norms, and the specific principles embodied in the AICP Code.

Exploration of Research Questions

We interviewed APA members² to gain a better understanding of contemporary ethical dilemmas faced by practicing planners. In the open-ended question of our prior survey, some respondents mentioned they felt comfortable with the ethics in their workplace culture, whereas others mentioned conflicts due to workplace norms. The aforementioned extant literature suggests an incongruence may arise in situations where there is a disjuncture between the individual planner's understanding of planning's domain ethics and the ethical considerations of their workplace's culture. Thus, we wondered whether there are differences in practicing planners' ethical frameworks used in their private lives and their perceptions of, or experiences with, their personal constructions of professional ethics and their workplace ethical norms.

Finally, we were interested in how well the AICP Code functions to assist planners in resolving the above set of tensions. Does the code influence our respondents' ethical decision making? Are there rules in the code that are particularly helpful or problematic? Does the code function well for planners in both the public sector and the private sector?

In-Depth Interview Methodology Why Interview Survey Respondents?

We conducted semistructured qualitative interviews as part of a sequential mixed-methods research project for the dual purpose of "expansion" and "convergence" to our previous survey (Lauria & Long, 2017). In our original article we assessed answers to simple scenarios and quantified factors that may lose meaning when reduced. Our interviews for this study, semistructured conversations with 61 practicing planners, sought deeper insights into questions of motivations in decision making and how planners personally determine ethical behavior in the contested and real-world situations they faced. Participants were able to explain their responses in a way that could not be accomplished in a survey format because the survey scenarios cannot fully capture the complexity of professional practice or allow for participant elaboration. These interviews were an opportunity to hear how planners think ethics affects the planning profession and their lives.

The Interviews, Coding Process, and Characteristics of Interviewees

At the end of our 2015 survey, we asked respondents to provide us with an email to reach them if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. The 111

Table 1

Interview and survey sample comparison.

Data	Interview sample (n = 61)	2015 survey sample (n = 1,334)	APA membership salary survey (n = 7,248)
Experience	20 median years	19 median years	15 median years
Planning education	64%	60%	57%
AICP	72%	69%	58%
Age	24% between 26 and 40	31.5% between 26 and 40	40% between 26 and 40
Gender	59% male	57.1% male	64% male
Race	85% White	87.5% White	86% White

respondents from the survey who agreed to participate in the interview were emailed to schedule a time for the interview. The 4 respondents who agreed to be interviewed in first week of our interview schedule were selected for the pilot study. The remaining 61 respondents who selected interview slots were used for the analysis in this study. One of the authors (Long) conducted all the interviews by telephone.

The first nine interview questions were identical to the survey demographic questions, allowing us to link the interview responses to these demographic categories while avoiding identification of individual respondents.³ In Table 1 we show a comparison of these data from the 61 interviewees and the survey sample (n = 1,334). The interview, survey, and APA membership samples are demographically similar, though the average interviewee on whom we report in this study had more experience and a slightly greater number had obtained a master's degree in planning and AICP certification than had those in the 2014 APA membership sample. Slightly more than 60% of the interview respondents were employed in the public sector (see Figures 1 and 2⁴).

We asked the following two questions to elicit each participant's ethical framework in making personal and professional decisions:

When making a *personal* decision, do you choose the solution that

a. has the best outcome for the most people (utilitarian)?

- b. will allow you to follow the rules even if you do not like the results (deontological)?
 c. is best for you (hedonistic)?
 d. is best for your personal reputation (aspirational)?

When making a *professional* decision, do you choose the solution that

- a. has the best outcome for the most people (utilitarian)?
 b. will allow you to follow the rules even if you do not like the results (deontological)?
 c. is best for you (hedonistic)?
 d. is best for your professional reputation (aspirational)?

We asked open-ended questions for the remainder of the interviews to allow for a more conversational interview style and to determine how participants felt about the AICP Code and how it applied to their professional lives. We were able to elicit interviewee opinions on the AICP Code and their use of it in practice. Finally, we asked all interviewees to describe a professional ethical dilemma they or someone they knew had faced and whether they had any additional insights they would like to share.

We verified the content of the transcripts by listening to each recording while reading its transcript. We coded the data iteratively, first reviewing and coding the data inductively. Initially, we developed 31 themes in a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992; Glaser &

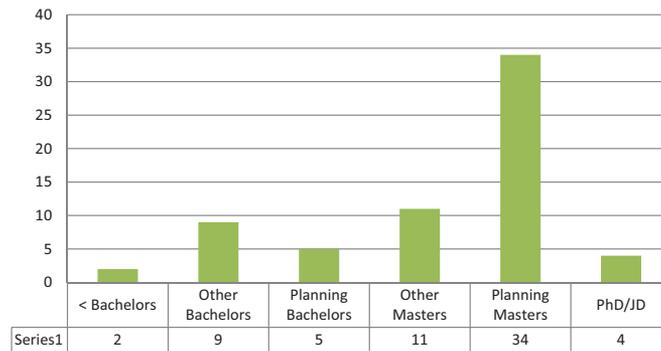


Figure 1. Education level attained.

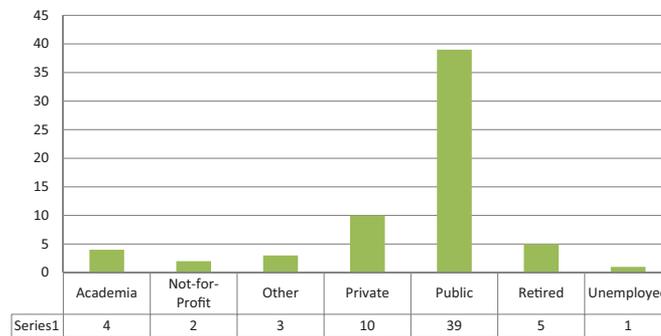


Figure 2. Planner employment sector.

Straus, 1967). We developed additional themes as we coded, ending up with 65 themes grouped into codes with subcodes. Finally, we coded the transcripts a third time with a more theoretically directed deductive process, assigning each ethical dilemma presented with an AICP Code rule number (Section B of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct). The interview codes are presented in Chart 1 in the [Technical Appendix](#).

We developed four interviewee profiles, one randomly selected from each sector: public, private, official, and academic. Each of the four selected interviewees confirmed the constructed profile reflected the views they expressed in the interview. This profiling process allowed us to confirm the internal validity of our interpretations.

Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis

We used MAXQDA tools (VERBI Software, 2016), a computer-aided qualitative analysis software program, for coding and analyzing the interview transcripts. We used the MAXQDA Code Matrix Browser tool to create a visual representation of the frequency of the codes, providing the total respondent ethical frameworks in both their personal and professional lives. We uncovered the planners who mentioned the use of different ethical frameworks applied in their professional practices and their

personal lives with the Code Relations Browser tool. We used the Code Line tool to provide a visual comparison of how each interviewee’s ethical frameworks were coded and to demonstrate how a single planner used different ethical frameworks. This ties back to the idea of convergence: A planner may feel they have to use several ethical perspectives to come to a single best answer. Finally, we had a colleague code the data from two randomly chosen participants to use MAXQDA’s intercoder validity check to verify our coding.

Interpreting the Interviews

Interviewee Profiles

We developed interviewee profiles to provide a concrete sense of the scope of the interviews as well as the diversity of the responses. The profiles are written in the voice of the respondents and many of the segments are quoted, though the names are fictitious to protect the identity of the participants (these profiles are presented in the [Technical Appendix](#)). From the profiles, we saw that planners integrated ethics into their professional lives. Susan thinks the codes of ethics are important and useful in the two fields in which she is certified but instead tends to make decisions with her “gut.” With 39 years of experience, she has internalized the codes

and is now able to trust her gut without recognizing ethical conflicts. Trusting her gut is an example of how years of experience internalizes the codes. Jake, who as a consultant declined a job due to ethical concerns, describes situations in which planners have to decide between taking a job or maintaining their ethics. Here, Jake demonstrates the difficult challenges planners face when their professional position conflicts with their private and professional codes of ethics. Ken, the planning commissioner with a deontological ethical leaning, is uncomfortable when other commissioners seem to make decisions based on workplace cultural norms rather than rule-driven decisions. He provides an example of how workplace culture can conflict with ethical choices and influence decisions. Finally, Justin, a young zoning administrator, finds security in following the rules of his job. Justin says he is utilitarian in his private ethical framework but uses a deontological framework at work. He demonstrates how experience, or lack thereof, can influence a planner's ethical framework.

A composite profile in which we represent the most common traits of the interview participants is a White male, with AICP certification, who works for the public sector. He is utilitarian in his private ethical leaning but deontological in his professional ethical leaning. He is 55 years old, has more than 20 years of planning experience, and lives in the western section of the United States. He has gone to college for planning, is familiar with the AICP Code, and believes it is important. Though he cannot quote the AICP Code, he is familiar enough with it to use its intent in his decision making.

Interviewees' Ethical Frameworks

The interviewees espoused frameworks that differed from the ethical frameworks we inferred from our original survey, even though the interview sample is similar to the original survey sample both professionally and demographically (see Table 1). Interview and survey respondents most frequently identified with a deontological framework in that they are more likely to follow the rules regardless of the outcome. However, as represented in Table 2, the interview respondents claimed to be far less deontological (rule-based) and more utilitarian (concerned with doing the most good for the most people) than what we were able to infer from survey respondents' answers to the ethical scenarios provided in the questionnaire (84% for survey respondents but only 57% for interview respondents).

When prompted about the ethical basis of their professional and personal decisions (Figure 3), interviewees indicated they were more likely to follow the rules when making professional decisions (57%) but more likely to

Table 2

Self-assigned versus inferred ethical frameworks.

Data	Interview sample (n = 61) (%)	Survey sample (n = 1,334) (%)
Deontological	45	80.4
Utilitarian	39	1.1
Other	10	10.0
Aspirational	2	7.9

try to do the most good for the most people when making personal decisions (48%). Nearly 56% of the interviewees stated they used different ethical principles in their personal and professional lives. The 21 participants who said they had a specific ethical framework in their personal lives and a different one in their professional lives stated they were deontological in their professional lives. In addition, they were more likely to use multiple ethical frameworks in their professional decisions.

We were curious about the bases of the interviewees' decision making: Was it based in their education, the AICP Code, the law, or their practical experience? The greatest response was "law/codes" (Figure 4). This corroborates responses from an earlier interview question in reference to their ethical framework in which 47% answered they followed the rules regardless of outcome, indicating a deontological framework functioning in their professional practice.

One of our expectations was that experience would influence ethical choice. Twenty-five of the interview respondents (41%) said experience contributed to their decision making. Here we interpret experience to also incorporate education and certification. If these two components are added to the respondents' explicit recognition of the effect of experience, the total grows to 41 participants (slightly more than two-thirds), the same number that said they used the law as their decision guide. Of the 32 interviewees who provided more than one basis for their ethical choice, the largest joint usage was between the "law/codes" and "experience" choices. Clearly, along with law, experience plays a role in these planners' ethical decision making.

Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Practicing Planners

We asked the interviewees to "share a professional ethical dilemma you or someone you know had faced." We

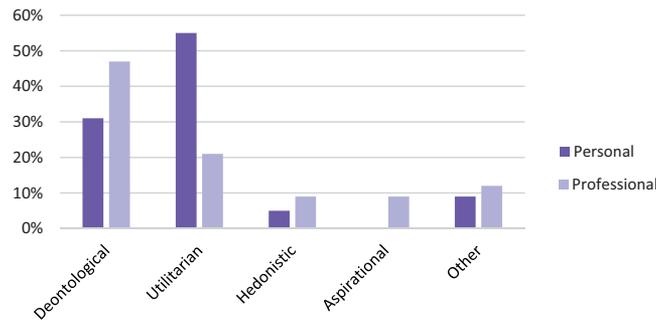


Figure 3. Self-assigned ethical leaning.

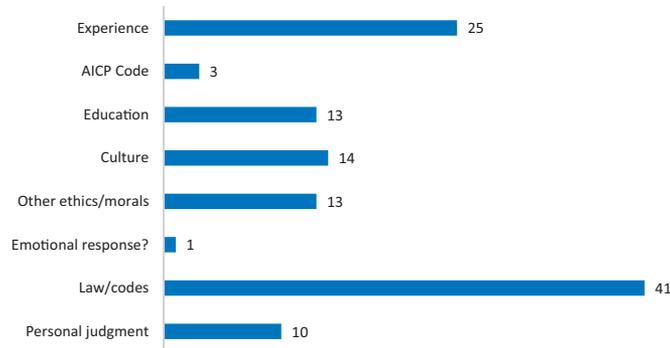


Figure 4. Bases of ethical decision making.

asked, “What was the outcome? How did you/they come to that resolution? What was learned from this resolution/situation?” The interviewees presented 65 ethical situations ranging in intensity and in outcome. Some of the respondents found they had to quit their jobs; others found ways to deal with it, though it meant accepting the cognitive and emotive dissonance associated with their unethical behavior. Some interesting comments on conflicts, as explained by several of the respondents, were as follows:

Well, yes, actually once. The city where I worked for 30 years really has very strong neighborhood participation, which has for the most part been excellent, but occasionally it has been a real pain. The State of California ultimately made a requirement that all cities allow secondary dwelling units; they included some provisions that must be included. We, of course, had to comply. Single-family neighborhoods were really upset. I ended up being the planner and the weaver of the ordinance that met the letter of the law and totally was against the spirit of the intent of the law. I did make my feelings known, and it was legal, but it was a really tough one, because I didn’t think it was the right way to go. Most of the people in the department didn’t feel

it was the right way to go. We did make our feelings known to both the planning commission and the city council. The planning commission was actually more sympathetic; the city council was not. They were totally swayed by the neighborhoods, and it is probably the single most important thing that I worked on that I regretted in my career.

I am a planning commissioner here and that [dissonance between private and professional ethics] has had some interesting repercussions at times. It has never been a conflict but [it has been] uncomfortable for me trying to convince people that I am not acting in a way that is averse to the people in town, it is just that I cannot do something because I don’t feel ethically that it is something that I should do.

I lost a job because of that [conflict between professional ethics and workplace culture]. My supervisor did not value my values, and that was an entitlement for them to do as they please, so I lost the job. Most of my surveys have been reviewed by ethical committees. They meet all the scientific criteria that are required. Sometimes people at the management level think that this is really not important.

You know, you could say yes or no. Sometimes an individual approaches an issue differently than other people would, but *conflict* is a tricky word. I think there are different approaches in dealing with an issue, and sometimes you have to be able to have a discussion about the appropriate track to take. Sometimes there is a cause for discussion.

We find the degree of concern due to an ethical conflict ranged from no conflict to creating an uncomfortable workplace to the loss of a job. What should a planner do when he finds himself in an ethical dilemma but cannot afford to lose his job? This same conundrum arose in the survey responses, where it was reported that some planners found it difficult to follow the AICP Code due to work and family concerns.

We explored ethical conflicts by asking, "Have your personal ethics ever come into conflict with your professional ethics?" and "Have your personal ethics ever come into conflict with your workplace culture?" Twenty-nine interviewees (47.5%) revealed they had experienced conflicts between their private and professional ethics, whereas 39 (64%) have had personal (private and professional ethical) conflicts with their workplace cultural norms.

Practicing Planners' View of the AICP Code

We asked interviewees whether they were "aware of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct" with the follow-up question, "What do you think of them?" All respondents indicated they were aware of the AICP Code, but there were varying opinions about its importance.

I don't think about it specifically, but I agree with the place of the code. So indirectly.

Several said the AICP Code is common sense:

I don't go back to them. I think practical common sense regarding ethics gives me the best guidance. I think the AICP ethics follow that.

Some compared it to a sense that doing the right thing is the same as following the AICP Code:

I think I search to do the right thing which is what I think the AICP Code calls for, regardless whether there be a code.

Some said they do not have to think about it too much:

In a general way, since I am not, fortunately for us we do not run into a lot of things that are questionable

ethically. We have good leadership at our department level, our agency level, and our policy board level. So, I don't find myself in a situation that often where I have to think, you know, "How do I have to make this decision to follow the AICP Code of Ethics?" I think we have a very ethical standard in our department that doesn't make me need to look at this very often.

In general, a majority (56%) of those interviewed thought the AICP Code was meaningful and useful, though very few used it explicitly to make their decisions. Commenting on the AICP Code, interviewees said, "When I had to memorize it, I liked it a lot," and "I probably don't read them as often as I should. It is a good thing to remind yourself of all the time." Although many planners studied the AICP Code for the certification test, they do not necessarily retain its specifics in their daily practice. On the other hand, some interviewees felt the AICP Code is only common sense: "I would say [they are not useful] because ethical behavior and decisions are so much a part of the core of who I am. With or without those I would say that is who I am."

Seventy-one percent of our respondents indicated the AICP Code influenced their professional decision making. Their declaration is consistent with responses that indicate they internalized the AICP Code: Planners know the AICP Code and believe it is influential but do not consciously think about it during their practical decision making. Below is a sample of the responses regarding the AICP Code's influence.

To the extent if they line up with the way I conduct myself because I think in some areas I am probably more conservative than the AICP Code of Ethics. I don't use it as the sole source of guidance as far as ethics are concerned. But there is a lot of overlap with the other criteria I use.

Yes. I do believe in the code and take it seriously even though I think there are some statements that are challenging to deal with; I believe in the main proponents of it. Responsibility to the public as a whole and my responsibility to my client, my employer, and my profession. I take that seriously, I use that for guidance all the time, try to do what is right.

No, as I said I am not very familiar with it. But we have a pretty strong ethical culture in our organization, and I would say that is what I rely on.

Although most of the respondents thought the AICP Code is influential, some thought it is confusing, some

thought it is too open to interpretation, and others thought it is too restrictive.

We enumerated the number of times an AICP rule appeared in an ethical dilemma presented by the interviewees in Table 1 of the [Technical Appendix](#). The three AICP Code rules most often involved in the 65 ethical situations were as follows:

Rule 2: We shall not accept an assignment from a client or employer when the services to be performed involve conduct that we know to be illegal or in violation of these rules (at 23%).

Rule 5: We shall not, as public officials or employees, accept from anyone other than our public employer any compensation, commission, rebate, or other advantage that may be perceived as related to our public office or employment (at 15%).

Rule 25: We shall neither deliberately, nor with reckless indifference, commit any wrongful act, whether or not specified in the Rules of Conduct, that reflects adversely on our professional fitness (at 12%).

In the following transcript excerpts, we represent the most commonly cited situations involving the above rules.

We had an occasion where a building developer was intentionally manipulating the rules and asking for a special development permit that was not consistent with the zoning and planning regulations that the city had approved. We tried very hard to get him to change his plans; we ended up voting it down even though we thought it was otherwise a good project. City council overruled us and decided to change the rules.

Yes, probably within the last two years, I was on an RFP [request for proposals] selection committee for 2040 LRPT [long-range transportation plan]. One of the members on it provided a high score, even though they [city] had issues with that company before. No sooner than we selected them, that person went to work for them. It was an elected official.

Yes, we have had an issue with [a grant application that] needed to be approved by the end of the fiscal year, June 30. We did not have quite enough time to do the study completely. It was decided to submit an estimate of the results, and this was troubling to my personal ethics. We had asked for an extension to the project, and we were actually able to get the extension. I just figured there would be litigation that could be avoided.

The interviewees did not present any ethical conflicts that involved Rules 9 through 17 and 22 and 23. We suspect this may be evidence of a lack of awareness of these rules rather than the lack of awareness of situations that violate these rules. Interviewees alerted us to the issue that the AICP rules may not be completely clear or actually applicable in particular jurisdictions. For example,

Rule 9: We shall not engage in private discussion with decision makers in the planning process in any manner prohibited by law or by agency rules, procedures, or customs.

One interviewee brought to our attention that some jurisdictions do not allow planners to speak to decision makers. A planner may not be permitted to carry information between decision makers in some places, whereas in other jurisdictions a planner is encouraged to have discussions with decision makers. Planners may find this rule confusing at best when there are different expectations encoded into law, policy, or custom in different jurisdictions.

The AICP Code is useful only to those who know it, according to our interview respondents. Of the 24% of those who gave a reason as to why a participant did not use the AICP Code, the predominant answer was they are not familiar with it. The two next most popular reasons for ignoring the AICP Code as guidance (both at 10%) involved a personal ethical code ("I'm more conservative than the AICP Code" or "it's just common sense") and the AICP Code's lack of clarity. Though the use of a personal professional ethical code may seem to replace the AICP Code, this may be misleading. Many practicing planners in our samples have in fact internalized much of the espoused professional planner (AICP) code of ethics through their education, certification, and maintenance process as well as through their practical professional experience:

Ethics to me is, I am not going to lie, I am going to provide the best advice for my client and protect them from doing something that could be illegal in the eyes of the regulations. So, I vow professionally to my firm and to myself as a professional planner.

This evidence of the code's internalization reinforces the value in emphasizing the AICP Code in planning education and AICP certification maintenance.

Private-Sector Planners

Interviewees categorized their employment status as public, private, retired, academic, or other. In evaluating

the demographic information and the self-asserted ethical frameworks of our interview sample by employment sector, we find the private-sector planners were less likely to have a planning education and profess a utilitarian perspective than the public-sector planners. On the other hand, private-sector respondents were more likely to be certified, to have multiple certifications, to be female, to be White, and to espouse a hedonistic perspective than were public-sector planners (see Table 2 of the [Technical Appendix](#)). In addition to expressed concerns over the clarity of some of the AICP Code rules, private-sector planners felt neither the survey's ethical scenarios nor (more important here) the AICP Code itself realistically reflects the ethical dilemmas they face in their professional practice.

The Cost of Ethical Dissonance

Most practicing planner respondents (survey and interview) faced problems that required solutions guided by ethical principles. Interview respondents claimed to be far less deontological and more utilitarian than what we were able to infer from respondents' answers to the ethical scenarios provided in our earlier survey. From these interviews, we see many planners operate from more than one ethical framework and use different frameworks in their personal and professional lives. This suggests planners may use different ethical frameworks depending on the context. For example, they sometimes felt compelled to use the law and at other times felt they should find the best solution for the most people. A planner's position or degree of prior experience may have played a role in their use of various ethical frameworks. For instance, a zoning administrator is more likely to make decisions based on the law, whereas a neighborhood organizer might be inclined to maximize the number of people who benefit from a decision.

Following Howe and Kaufman (1979), we had assumed the central potential ethical conflict in professional planning practice comes from planners' commitment to the scientific legitimacy of their technical planning analysis (planning expertise) and the democratic legitimacy of political decision makers as they pertain to the implementation of planning recommendations (Lauria & Long, 2017). In addition to these conflicts substantiated in our survey, our interviews unveiled ethical conflicts between planners' private ethical frameworks and those they felt required to use in their professional practice. Most of our interviewees espoused different ethical frameworks in their personal lives than they would use in professional practice. In relation to their private ethical frameworks, most said

they would make decisions based on doing the most good for the most people. A plurality of respondents (47%) indicated in their professional practice they would more likely make decisions based on the rules (legal and AICP Code).

We were surprised to find that, in addition to these classical ethical conflicts, most of our interviewees revealed the difficulties in resolving ethical conflicts between the ethical frameworks in their personal lives and those they felt they should use in their professional practice. Our findings are similar to the alienation found in Taşan-Kok and Oranje's (2018) collection of settings but in significantly older and more experienced practicing planners.

Conflicts between private and professional ethical frameworks, or workplace culture, created cognitive and emotive dissonance to varying degrees of severity, from mild workplace and emotional discomfort to the inability to remain in that professional position or particular workplace. The disassociation of espoused private ethics and the ethical framework used in professional decisions may be a coping mechanism to help resolve these experiences of cognitive and emotive dissonance. In fact, most respondents often found it difficult to follow the AICP Code in their planning practice due to concerns regarding job security.⁵ These professional planners struggled with emotional and ethical dissonance in their attempts to balance their personal (private and professional) ethics, their workplace norms and culture, and their professional code of ethics. Thus, the AICP Code could benefit from a round of revision discussions that focus on how the code can help minimize this dissonance.

According to our prior survey results, most planners use the AICP Code for guidance in professional situations. Most planners interviewed (71%) found the AICP Code worthwhile and influential, though the AICP Code did not appear useful for all planners or at all times. Most likely no code could, but most saw it as a useful and meaningful document for planners to use. Many of the private-sector planners felt the AICP Code neglects to address the ethical concerns they faced in practice and that the APA and the AICP rarely considered their concerns. These findings suggest the AICP Code, though extremely valuable, also could benefit from a round of revision discussions that focus on clarity and current professional practice contextual applicability, in particular employment sector and jurisdictional context.

The predominant reason given by those who did not use the AICP Code was that they were not familiar with it. This suggests planning education and AICP certification maintenance should continue to emphasize ethical training, perhaps using ethical

scenario role-playing to provide a safe space for planners to develop decision-making skills consistent with their private and professional ethics. In addition, it is useful for planners to have access to ethical dilemmas faced by other planners to prepare them for similar situations and to give them confidence in how to handle an ethical situation when it comes up. As a next step, inspired by this research, Long created and maintains a forum for planning ethics discussion at www.RealPlanningEthics.com. Each ethical scenario has a general setup describing a situation a planner might face. Some questions elucidate the situation and add additional ideas to think about. As planners engage in a posed ethical dilemma, they discuss potential issues, express their emotional feelings, and give hypothetical responses. In essence, they are able to practice resolving ethical dilemmas in a safe space.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental data for this article can be found on the publisher's website.

NOTES

1. Section B of the AICP Code is that portion of the code from which an AICP-certified planner can be held accountable. Although this is rarely enforced, an AICP-certified planner can lose his or her certification for violating these rules.
2. It should be noted that not all APA members are AICP certified. In fact, only 69% of our interviewees indicated they were AICP certified. Regardless, most APA members consider themselves part of the community of U.S. professional planners and view the AICP Code of Ethics as the code of ethics for all members of that professional community even if they personally cannot be sanctioned for not abiding by its rules.
3. Although it would have been useful to link the data from the interviews directly to the survey responses to evaluate the representativeness of the interview sample and to evaluate the clarity of survey, this would have weakened survey respondent anonymity.
4. The graphs show more than 61 responses because three interviewees had dual degrees in planning and another field such as civil engineering.

5. AICP Code violation enforcement is rare; therefore, the real threat implied here is political workplace retribution for not ignoring the code.

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