



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Ethics in Research

## Author(s)

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## Description

An engineering professor faces a dilemma in reviewing papers for engineering journals.

## Body

## Part I

Adam Benitez, an engineering professor, published a groundbreaking paper several years ago and is thus renowned in his area. Not content to rest on his laurels, he has continued to work and publish in his field.

Benitez also serves as a reviewer for two prestigious academic engineering journals, **Engineering Today** and **Engineering in Action**. In July 1998, he received a paper for review for publication in **Engineering Today** by an engineering professor from China. The paper was very good, and Benitez would normally have recommended it for publication without hesitation. But three months earlier, Benitez received another paper from the same author for review for the journal, **Engineering in Action**.

The two papers submitted by the Chinese engineer to the two journals are almost identical. Benitez has not yet reviewed either paper. What should he do?

### **Questions:**

1. Should Benitez recommend against the publication of the paper submitted to *Engineering Today* because the same author had already submitted an almost identical paper three months earlier to *Engineering in Action*?
2. What are Benitez's alternatives of action?
3. What are the ethical issues raised by this case?
4. Should Benitez's editorial comments for *Engineering Today* refer to the prior submission to *Engineering in Action*?

## **Part II**

Both papers by the Chinese engineer build on Benitez's groundbreaking paper of several years earlier. Prior to receiving the first paper of the Chinese engineer, Benitez submitted a paper of his own that grew out of his prior work, which was accepted for publication although it has not yet appeared in print. The problem: the papers written by the Chinese engineer are identical to his own recent paper except for one nonessential mathematical formula.

### **Questions:**

1. Evaluate and compare the following options:
  - a. Benitez should return both papers to their respective editors saying that he has a conflict of interest.
  - b. Benitez should discuss the situation with both editors.
  - c. Benitez should reject both papers without comment.
  - d. Benitez should, out of generosity, withdraw his own paper from publication.
2. Develop and defend your own position.

### **Notes**

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Conflict of Interest

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Publication Ethics

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