

Interdisciplinary Innovation Ethics: The Role of Moral Reasoning and Professional Identity in the Development of Counseling and Psychotherapy Science

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge convergence and the acceleration of interdisciplinary innovation—spanning psychology, counselling, psychotherapy, data science, artificial intelligence, health, education, and the social sciences create opportunities for developing more adaptive and sustainable bodies of knowledge. However, cross-boundary innovation also amplifies ethical complexity, particularly when technology, institutional interests, and service delivery demands intersect with professional values (confidentiality, client autonomy, justice, nonmaleficence, and beneficence). This article reports a qualitative study in the form of a qualitative evidence synthesis of peer-reviewed journal literature from 2023–2025, examining how moral reasoning and professional identity function in leading transformative change in the development of counselling and psychotherapy scholarship. The synthesis identifies four central themes: (1) value–goal friction (clinical effectiveness, safety, justice, and sustainability) as a primary source of dilemmas in innovation; (2) moral reasoning as a transformative competence that links ethical principles, impact analysis, and stakeholder considerations; (3) professional identity as both a compass and a boundary that sustains practice integrity and accountability; and (4) the need for ethical infrastructure, including governance, responsible standardisation, and capacity-building for interdisciplinary teams. The study underscores the importance of curricula and supervision that cultivate moral reasoning, values-based dialogue, and reflective professional identity, so that interdisciplinary innovation in counselling and psychotherapy remains oriented toward human wellbeing and sustainability.

Keywords: *interdisciplinary innovation, moral reasoning, professional identity, counseling, psychotherapy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, scholarship in counselling and psychotherapy has become increasingly interconnected across multiple fields. Clinical work now intersects with education, public policy, digital health, data science, and the use of technology in society. This expanding connectivity calls for new ideas drawn from diverse domains not only for technical collaboration, but also for aligning ways of thinking, scientific language, and shared values across disciplines (Cooper et al., 2024).

On the one hand, interdisciplinary collaboration can help generate better approaches to supporting people and communities. This includes using evidence-based methods to evaluate treatment effectiveness, integrating services to improve continuity and quality of care, and leveraging technology to enhance access and engagement in health services. On the other hand, the landscape becomes more complex because innovation often emerges within systems involving multiple actors such as hospitals, private companies, and governmental regulators. These conditions may produce tensions between speeding up implementation and ensuring safety; between tailoring care to

individuals and protecting confidentiality; and between rapid adoption of new methods and concerns about their appropriateness (Flaherty & Krishnan, 2025).

For counselling and psychotherapy, such issues are particularly intensified because the core of both practice and research rests on human relationships, trust, and the protection of client confidentiality. Contemporary ethical challenges may arise, for example, when therapists view clients' online activity, when client data are integrated into larger organisational systems, or when technology-mediated decisions shape how people are assessed, diagnosed, and referred (White & Hanley, 2024). In these contexts, the capacity to deliberate carefully and wisely about difficult choices is essential for leading transformative change responsibly. Moral reasoning is not merely about deciding what is right or wrong; it also involves constructing defensible ethical justifications, anticipating consequences, navigating conflicts among competing values, and identifying risk-management strategies that take into account the needs of all relevant stakeholders (Watts et al., 2024).

Beyond deliberations about right and wrong, a robust professional identity provides guidance for scholarly and clinical work. Professional identity includes understanding the role of the counsellor or psychologist, the values the profession upholds, the boundaries of one's competence, and the ethical obligations owed to clients, the profession, and the broader social context. Research suggests that a well-developed professional identity is associated with greater consistency in practice, stronger professional support, and better adaptation to systemic change and emerging technologies (Dollarhide et al., 2023). In Indonesia and the Asia–Pacific region, strengthening professional identity in counselling and psychotherapy is complicated by cultural and social diversity, variations in laws and regulations, and the evolving nature of education and service delivery. This context calls for ethical leadership that bridges international professional standards with locally situated needs in ways that are equitable and sustainable (Granello & Gunawan, 2023).

At the same time, the concept of sustainability broadens the scope of ethics. It shifts attention beyond ensuring short-term safety toward considering how interventions affect community wellbeing over time, who gains access to care, how data are governed, and the wider societal impacts of new ideas and technologies. Consequently, knowledge production in counselling and psychotherapy requires ethical systems that are aligned with sustainability and justice goals (Robertson et al., 2025).

Grounded in this context, the present study aims to compile and review recent peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2023 and 2025. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) identify the types of ethical challenges arising in interdisciplinary innovation within counselling and psychotherapy; (2) examine how moral reasoning and professional identity shape decision-making and the development of scholarly work; and (3) propose recommendations for strengthening ethical practice in education, research, and professional settings.

This article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant theories and prior research; Section 3 outlines the research methodology; Section 4 presents the findings; Section 5 discusses the implications of the results; and the final section concludes with recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Ethics

In counselling and psychotherapy, professional ethics is typically grounded in core moral concepts such as autonomy, the promotion of wellbeing, nonmaleficence (avoiding harm), justice, and fidelity (trust). These foundational values are then translated into ethical guidelines and practical standards for professional conduct. When innovative approaches involve multiple disciplines, these core principles remain essential, but they must be interpreted in ways that fit emerging domains such as data governance, system transparency and explainability, the appropriate limits of AI applications, and the clarification of professional roles across disciplinary boundaries (Kitchener, 1984).

Ethical decision-making frameworks in counselling commonly emphasise a structured, step-by-step process: identifying the ethical issue, reviewing relevant principles and standards, attending to context (including culture and power dynamics), exploring alternative courses of action, seeking consultation or supervision, and evaluating likely consequences. In interdisciplinary innovation, the consultation stage often extends beyond clinical supervision to include non-clinical stakeholders, ensuring that decisions are not only in the client's best interest but also ethically defensible and operationally feasible within broader organisational and technological systems (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996).

Moral Reasoning

Moral development theory suggests a shift from making moral decisions based primarily on external compliance toward decision-making guided by internalised principles. In professional practice, moral reasoning is often understood as the capacity to justify ethical judgments in a coherent manner that aligns with professional values particularly when navigating conflicts of interest, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

According to Rest's Four-Component Model, moral behaviour depends on four interrelated capacities: moral judgment (reasoning about what ought to be done), moral sensitivity (recognising the ethical dimensions of a situation), moral motivation (prioritising moral values over competing interests), and moral character or moral courage (sustaining ethical action under pressure). This framework is useful for analysing challenges in innovation for example, professionals' ability to detect risks such as data bias, to choose designs that promote fairness, and to maintain the confidence and resolve to resist harmful practices amid organisational pressures.

Professional Identity

Professional identity refers to the internalisation of the values, standards, and role expectations that shape how individuals understand themselves as professionals and how they conduct themselves in accordance with professional norms. The literature on professional identity development highlights a complex process that involves sustained practice-based experiences, deliberate supervision, the construction of a professional self-narrative, and recognition and validation by the professional community (Dollarhide et al., 2023).

Strengthening counselling professional identity is considered particularly important in the Indonesian context to clarify service expectations, enhance legitimacy, and reinforce boundaries of

competence. With a clearer professional identity, practitioners may navigate interdisciplinary work more effectively—helping them discern when collaboration strengthens practice and when it may compromise service quality or blur ethical responsibilities (Granello & Gunawan, 2023).

Synthesis of Previous Studies and Knowledge Gaps

Studies on counsellors' professional identity consistently highlight the importance of professional self-narratives, structured practice experiences, and reflective learning as key mechanisms for identity formation. Qualitative analyses of the professional identity literature commonly identify themes such as values commitment, a sense of belonging within the professional community, and role clarity as central supports for ethical decision-making. However, counselling and psychotherapy scholarship tends to approach ethics primarily at the **micro level** (the therapeutic relationship and clinical case deliberation), whereas the responsible innovation literature emphasises **meso–macro levels** (innovation processes, governance, and standardisation). There remains a limited number of frameworks that explicitly integrate these levels in the context of interdisciplinary innovation in psychological services.

Empirically, a notable gap concerns how counsellors and psychotherapists negotiate professional identity and moral responsibility when working alongside non-clinical actors throughout the innovation cycle—namely during design, implementation, and evaluation. Much of the existing literature remains conceptual or review-based, leaving practical mechanisms under-specified. In particular, the day-to-day dynamics of practice—such as negotiation strategies, forms of ethical resistance, and team learning processes—have not yet been mapped in sufficient detail.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Building on the reviewed literature, this study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates peer-reviewed journal scholarship from 2023–2025 to: (1) map the forms of ethical dilemmas arising in interdisciplinary innovation within counselling and psychotherapy; (2) explain how moral reasoning and professional identity shape decision-making and the development of scholarship; and (3) formulate operational recommendations for strengthening ethical capacity in education, research, and professional practice.

3. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach known as qualitative evidence synthesis (QES) to integrate findings and ethical insights from journal articles published between 2023 and 2025. QES was selected because it can illuminate how values, meanings, and contextual conditions shape practice dimensions that are often overlooked in more limited summaries focused primarily on effectiveness or technical outputs (Lin et al., 2025).

The dataset consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles in English and Indonesian addressing: (a) ethics and regulatory issues in interdisciplinary innovation; (b) moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and role-based responsibilities in organisational or professional contexts; and (c) how counsellors and therapists understand their professional identity and enact ethical standards. The 2023–2025 timeframe was chosen to capture the most recent scholarship, particularly in relation to technology and sustainability (Gurzawska, 2025).

The search strategy used core keywords and related terms, including interdisciplinary innovation or knowledge co-creation in combination with ethics, moral reasoning, professional identity, counselling, and psychotherapy. Screening proceeded in two stages: first, titles and abstracts were

reviewed to assess topical relevance and publication period; second, full texts were examined to determine conceptual fit and contribution to the research questions. Each step was documented to ensure transparency in how decisions were made (Lin et al., 2025).

Inclusion criteria were: peer-reviewed journal publications empirical studies, review articles, or conceptual papers published between 2023 and 2025. Eligible articles had to include substantive discussion of ethical issues, moral reasoning, professional identity, or innovation governance within psychology, counselling, or psychotherapy. Articles that focused solely on technology without ethical discussion, or that were not connected to professional practice or social services, were excluded (Robertson et al., 2025).

Quality appraisal was conducted pragmatically by assessing clarity of aims, coherence between arguments and findings, appropriateness of methods, and transparency of reporting. For qualitative studies, particular attention was paid to researchers' reflexivity, the adequacy of contextual description, and the extent to which the data supported key claims. For reviews or governance-oriented papers, appraisal focused on the internal consistency of central arguments and the clarity with which ethical issues were articulated (Lin et al., 2025).

Data analysis involved identifying and grouping salient ideas, including ethical dilemmas, moral reasoning processes, professional identity considerations, and requirements for effective governance. The researchers began by assigning descriptive codes to key ideas, then merged conceptually similar codes into broader categories. From these categories, cross-study themes were generated. This process was iterative: categories and themes were repeatedly reviewed and compared to ensure that the distinctive contributions of each study were preserved (Naeem et al., 2024). To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were used: (1) establishing an audit trail documenting analytic steps, including code and theme summaries; (2) triangulating perspectives by integrating counselling/psychotherapy scholarship with research on innovation governance; and (3) engaging in peer debriefing by checking emerging themes against the foundational arguments of key sources (Watts et al., 2024).

Because this study synthesised publicly available literature, it did not involve direct data collection from participants. Nevertheless, ethical considerations remained salient—particularly when interpreting work related to vulnerable populations, data privacy, and potential policy implications. Responsible scholarship was further supported by providing complete references and a full bibliography (Robertson et al., 2025).

4. FINDINGS

This process yielded four overarching themes that explain how ethical practice in innovation is addressed and discussed in the development of counselling and psychotherapy scholarship: (1) tensions between the values and goals of innovation; (2) moral reasoning as a transformative competence; (3) professional identity as both a guide and a boundary; and (4) the importance of ethical infrastructure to support sustainable innovation.

4.1. Value–Goal Friction in Interdisciplinary Innovation

Research indicates that when psychological services pursue innovation by integrating multiple disciplines, they often confront competing objectives. These objectives include improving accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency, safety, regulatory compliance, and sustainability. Problems arise when one aim such as efficiency is prioritised over others, such as the quality of the therapeutic relationship or the protection of client confidentiality (Flaherty & Krishnan, 2025).

Value tensions become more pronounced when professionals from different fields collaborate in decision-making. Team members' distinct scientific and professional backgrounds shape how they frame problems, define success, and interpret risk and harm. Studies of interdisciplinary teams show that communication patterns, authority structures, and role allocation can either strengthen or undermine the ethical quality of decisions (Watts et al., 2024). In counselling and psychotherapy, value friction also relates to sustaining professional integrity in practice maintaining a caring therapeutic relationship, respecting clients' rights to self-determination, and remaining within appropriate professional boundaries—especially when innovations require changes in service delivery, such as blended modalities, digital tools, or involvement of external actors (O'Hara, 2023).

Across cultures and national contexts, professional values often treated as universal must be interpreted in relation to specific local conditions. Research on international counselling values suggests that the salience of particular values such as collectivism, spirituality, and social harmony can shape how new services and policies are evaluated (Perron et al., 2023).

4.2. Moral Reasoning as a Transformative Competence

Moral reasoning is a competence that connects professional ethics with the evaluation of how innovations affect people and communities. In interdisciplinary projects, moral reasoning helps experts engage with questions such as: Who benefits? Who may be exposed to risk? What are the longer-term consequences? and How can we ensure fair opportunities and protect those who are more vulnerable? (Gurzawska, 2025).

Evidence from clinical ethics shows that ethical choices are not solely a matter of individual judgment; they emerge from the interplay of emotions, professional standards, and deliberative dialogue. Although moral reasoning is central to decision-making, studies also suggest that emotions and situational pressures can shape the clarity and quality of ethical deliberation (Dahò, 2025). In technology- and data-driven innovation, ethical reflection also raises questions of responsibility: who is accountable when a system influences decisions about care? The concept of *moral agency* highlights that ethical action requires both a well-developed sense of right and wrong in relation to one's professional role and an organisational environment that actively supports ethical conduct beyond mere rule compliance (Griffin, 2025).

In counselling and psychotherapy, moral reasoning becomes salient, for instance, when therapists consider whether to engage with clients' digital information. When therapists search for clients' online details, ethical tensions arise. Such situations illustrate how professionals attempt to balance a protective intent with the risks of privacy violation and potential erosion of trust within the therapeutic relationship (White & Hanley, 2024).

4.3. Professional Identity as Compass and Boundary

Professional identity functions as a compass, helping practitioners interpret and respond to complex situations and difficult choices. Research on professional identity development indicates that identity is formed through social and experiential processes such as education and training, collaboration within professional communities, mentoring and supervision, and the internalisation of shared values. A well-articulated identity enables professionals to assess whether new approaches align with their ethical commitments and to determine when adaptation or refusal is warranted (Dollarhide et al., 2023).

In the Asia-Pacific region, school counsellors often face difficulties in developing a strong professional identity due to role multiplicity, inconsistent expectations across schools, and limited institutional support and resources. Research suggests that strong leadership within the field and cross-national professional connections can support identity development and enhance the quality of practice (Harrison et al., 2025). In Indonesia, strengthening the professional identity of

counselling is particularly important because it helps establish clear standards regarding what counsellors should know and do, increases public trust in the profession, and safeguards counselling practice. In contexts of interdisciplinary collaboration, a clear professional identity also helps counsellors delineate where their roles begin and end such as decisions about collaboration partners, confidentiality management, and when referral to other professionals is necessary (Granello & Gunawan, 2023).

Moreover, professional identity can serve as a safeguard against the normalisation of practices that diminish client dignity or weaken the therapeutic relationship. Discussions of psychotherapy integrity emphasise that innovation should enhance the capacity to help, rather than displace the vital human relationship at the core of therapeutic work, without due ethical consideration (Gale, 2024).

4.4. Ethical Infrastructure for Sustainable Innovation

Ethical infrastructure such as governance arrangements, shared norms, accountability mechanisms, and organisational learning processes is crucial for sustaining responsible innovation. The literature on neurotechnology governance, for example, underscores the importance of approaches that include transparency, risk assessment, public participation, and layered oversight, particularly for technologies with high potential impact (Robertson et al., 2025).

Responsible standardisation is often viewed as essential for ensuring that innovations remain aligned with societal values. However, standards can also risk reducing complex ethical issues to checklist compliance. For this reason, scholars argue that standard-setting processes should be guided by principles of responsible innovation, so that standards do not merely accelerate business performance but also support ethical and socially desirable practice (Wiarda et al., 2025).

At the team level, factors such as effective leadership, psychologically safe environments for voicing concerns, and the sharing of knowledge and skills are critical to ensuring that ethical deliberation is not sidelined by project pressures. Research indicates that team composition and structure influence how thoroughly teams consider ethical dimensions and how likely they are to overlook morally salient issues (Watts et al., 2024).

One key element of ethical infrastructure is strengthening ethical competence through education and professional training. To align innovation with professional ethics, research-informed training and accreditation programmes can incorporate values-based dialogue, innovation impact assessment, and digital/AI literacy skills (Cooper et al., 2024). In addition, this synthesis highlights the need for a more holistic approach to sustainability that considers both environmental health and educational institutions. By challenging “always faster/bigger” assumptions and prioritising long-term wellbeing and equity, “beyond growth” perspectives such as degrowth imaginaries in education and wellbeing can strengthen the ethical foundations of innovation (Chatelier & Harrison, 2025).

5. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings, connects them with relevant theories and previous studies, and provides comprehensive answers to the research question

5.1. Conceptual Model of the Synthesis

The following conceptual model, grounded in the four themes discussed above, illustrates the relationships among moral reasoning, professional identity, and sustainable innovation outcomes in counselling and psychotherapy.

Komponen	Fungsi dalam inovasi antardisiplin	Indikator operasional (contoh)
Moral reasoning	Menimbang dilema dan konflik nilai; merancang mitigasi risiko; menelaraskan prinsip etika dengan analisis dampak.	Justifikasi etis terdokumentasi; analisis pemangku kepentingan; rencana mitigasi privasi/keadilan/keamanan.
Identitas profesional	Menjaga integritas praktik; menetapkan batas peran dan akuntabilitas; memastikan inovasi selaras dengan nilai profesi.	Pernyataan standar praktik; batas kolaborasi; keputusan rujukan; supervisi reflektif.
Tim antardisiplin	Mengintegrasikan keahlian; memfasilitasi deliberasi; mengelola perbedaan paradigma dan kekuasaan.	Aturan diskusi etik; keamanan psikologis; peran jelas; mekanisme eskalasi isu etik.
Tata kelola & standar	Membangun struktur akuntabilitas; mengarahkan standardisasi yang bertanggung jawab; memastikan evaluasi berkelanjutan.	Kebijakan data; audit etika; protokol evaluasi; partisipasi pengguna; compliance + refleksi nilai.

5.2. Responses to the Research Questions

Based on the findings, the ethics of interdisciplinary innovation in counselling and psychotherapy cannot be reduced to procedural compliance alone. Ethics functions as a deliberative and prudent approach for addressing value disputes, team dynamics, and institutional pressures. Accordingly, strengthening ethical capacity should be understood both as cultivating individual competencies and as developing socio-technical systems that enable genuinely ethical decision-making (Watts et al., 2024).

In bridging the gap between innovation ethics and professional ethics, moral reasoning appears to be pivotal. In professional settings, the emphasis is often placed on the therapeutic relationship, privacy, and client safety. In innovation contexts, the focus shifts toward systemic effects, standardisation, and governance. According to this synthesis, professionals can draw on mature moral reasoning to move beyond case-specific considerations and engage with broader contexts of policy and service development (Smedley et al., 2025).

Professional identity serves as a values compass and a safeguard against the erosion of practice integrity. Professionals are more likely to negotiate roles within interdisciplinary teams, resist unethical practices, and advocate for stronger governance when they have a clear and robust sense of who they are as professionals. This highlights the importance of professional training that integrates dilemma-based learning and values reflection (Dollarhide et al., 2023).

Implications for teaching and training include: (1) case-based ethics that explores moral decision-making in novel situations (e.g., data use, AI, online client research); (2) strengthening professional identity through reflective supervision and communities of practice; and (3) socio-technical literacy so that future counsellors and psychotherapists understand how technological systems shape service decisions and ethical issues (Cooper et al., 2024).

Implications for research and development : Research programmes should integrate ethical assessment alongside effectiveness evaluation for example, by examining impacts on privacy, access inequities, and the quality of the therapeutic relationship. Responsible innovation frameworks provide a vocabulary for designing innovation that is inclusive, reflective, anticipatory, and responsive (Gurzawska, 2025).

Implications for institutional governance (universities, service providers, professional associations): It is essential to establish data and technology policies that go beyond regulatory compliance by integrating procedures for thoughtful ethical deliberation across departments, including academic units, IT, service delivery, and legal affairs. Formal decision-making structures should make it easier to raise ethical concerns and foster an environment in which expressing moral doubt is acceptable (Watts et al., 2024).

In the Asia–Pacific region, particularly in Indonesia, strengthening professional identity can enhance public trust and clarify service standards. However, caution is needed to ensure that such efforts do not overlook deeply rooted local customs and diversity. Scholarship on global counselling ethics highlights the critical role of intercultural communication in fostering ethical progress (Granello & Gunawan, 2023).

A sustainability-oriented methodology requires longer time horizons, especially in examining how innovation affects the health of academic and professional ecosystems. Degrowth concepts, when applied to learning and wellbeing, provide an important lens for questioning assumptions of continuous expansion, enabling therapeutic progress to prioritise quality of life and justice rather than merely scaling what is offered (Chatelier & Harrison, 2025).

The conclusions drawn from this qualitative synthesis, which relies on existing literature, are strongly shaped by the rigour and scope of reporting within accessible studies. Furthermore, caution is warranted when applying these findings broadly, because certain high-technology innovation domains—particularly those involving AI or neurotechnology operate within frameworks that may differ from typical counselling practice (Lin et al., 2025).

5.3. Theoretical Implications and Study Limitations

Conceptually, moral reasoning and professional identity are positioned as ethical capabilities that influence the quality of counsellors'/psychotherapists' participation at each stage of innovation (problem formulation, design, piloting, implementation, and evaluation). These capabilities may be strengthened or weakened by team and governance factors (e.g., team norms, incentive pressures, standardisation) and may be mediated by relational ethics and cultural sensitivity when interacting with clients, families, and technology-user communities.

Innovation outcomes are assessed not only in terms of technical performance or efficiency, but also practice integrity, user safety and justice, and contributions to sustainable wellbeing. This framework aligns with the need to strengthen curricula and accreditation that emphasise research literacy, socio-technical literacy, and cross-disciplinary dilemma-based learning—so that counsellors/psychotherapists can serve as critical partners in innovation while safeguarding the interests of clients and the public.

6. CONCLUSION

The moral principles guiding collaborative, cross-disciplinary innovation in producing new knowledge for counselling and psychotherapy constitute a multi-level task involving the personal, team, and organisational levels. This synthesis supports the view that ethical thinking helps

professionals navigate competing values and develop plans to mitigate potential harms, while a strong professional self-understanding safeguards practice quality and accountability in interdisciplinary collaboration. To promote durable and meaningful change, educational institutions and professional bodies should strengthen training, supervision, and regulatory guidance to support ethical deliberation, appropriate standardisation, and context-sensitive value judgment. In doing so, innovation can expand scientific knowledge while protecting individual dignity and wellbeing.

7. COPYRIGHT & PATENTS

The authors declare that no patents or copyrighted products resulted from the research reported in this manuscript.

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