PRACTICING INTEGRITY

Integrity and Power: Report of Workshop

Held at DPU on 27 October 2017, 10.30-15.00

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Introduction

The Advisory Board's second meeting was conducted as a workshop with a wide range of stakeholders in the 'integrity field', including teachers of 'research integrity' and people involved in translating these concepts into institutional policies. The aim was to explore these practitioners' ideas and experience of research integrity as a way of sharing knowledge and fostering contacts and dialogue between teachers and institutional administrators concerned with 'integrity' in Denmark.

The results show that nearly everyone had an experience when academic integrity was breached; but they did not just talk about integrity as they also referred to trust, ethics, responsibility, professionalism. The over-riding theme running through participants' accounts was that breaches of integrity were often to do with unequal power relations, whether between student and supervisor, early stage researcher and Principal Investigator, institutional hierarchies, or inequalities between collaborating institutions. These results were interesting for the project as they indicated that integrity could not be isolated either conceptually or contextually, and that power relations were a crucial issue that did not feature strongly in the Codes of Conduct or the ways integrity issues were often discussed and handled.

Participants

An invitation to the Workshop was circulated to the Advisory Board and widely among different categories of stakeholders. There were 22 participants (including the project researchers) and they included: 1. Researchers from different disciplines and from different universities and UCs, including one from a profession recently merged with UCs and negotiating the transition to

research training. 2. Managers and administrators involved in drawing up Codes of Conduct, legal work regarding project contracts, and RCR coordination. 3. Research leaders. 4. Teachers of research integrity and ethics courses from different disciplinary perspectives. 5. Current and recent PhD students. 6. A former Ministry employee with experience of drawing up the Code and engaging in international debates.

Method

The workshop started with an orienting question:

How did Research Integrity become a problematic concept that needed action – what changes occurred in your context – personal and professional experiences?

The first session involved participants creating a collective history of 'integrity' as a concept in transition and a process of transformation. Participants were asked to focus on the above question and explore their own experiences and ideas about why and how this concept emerged. They were asked to think about key moments or events when they noticed something about research integrity in the news, in their institutions, or in their own working life – what was the problem, how was it presented, what needed changing, how? Everyone wrote these key moments or events up on a wall of butcher's paper with a rough time line stretching from 1970s to the present.

In a plenary discussion, each participant explained their contributions to the time line, drawing on events from their own past, scandals and other institutional changes that affected them, and issues in their current work. All participants had encountered behaviour that was unethical or lacked integrity at least once in their careers. Some contributions focused on a particular crisis or dilemma they had faced; many told the story of their career, recounting a series of incidents concerning colleagues or systems and revealing how the terms 'ethical' and 'integrity' had developed over time. In this way, participants created a collective history of the emergence and transformations of 'integrity'. It is important to note that creating this collective history did *not* mean seeking to create a consensus or a 'common cause'; rather, the collective history opened up a common space for debate.

As each participant gave their account, Rachel Douglas-Jones, using a technique called visual storytelling, made images and diagrams to depict the person's story.

To give one example (with the participant's permission) an academic in the social sciences did her PhD in the 1970s when individuals worked in isolation on their own research (represented as monkish cells). In that period of debates about the imperial and colonial heritage of western social science, a new wave of feminism focused reflexive awareness on how the researcher was positioned in fieldwork and in writing, and what effects even the most benign intervention could have on the society under study. Suddenly, a series of scandals broke that rocked social science disciplines. Social scientists were implicated in medical experiments on indigenous populations (e.g. spreading measles) and spying for U.S. intelligence services.
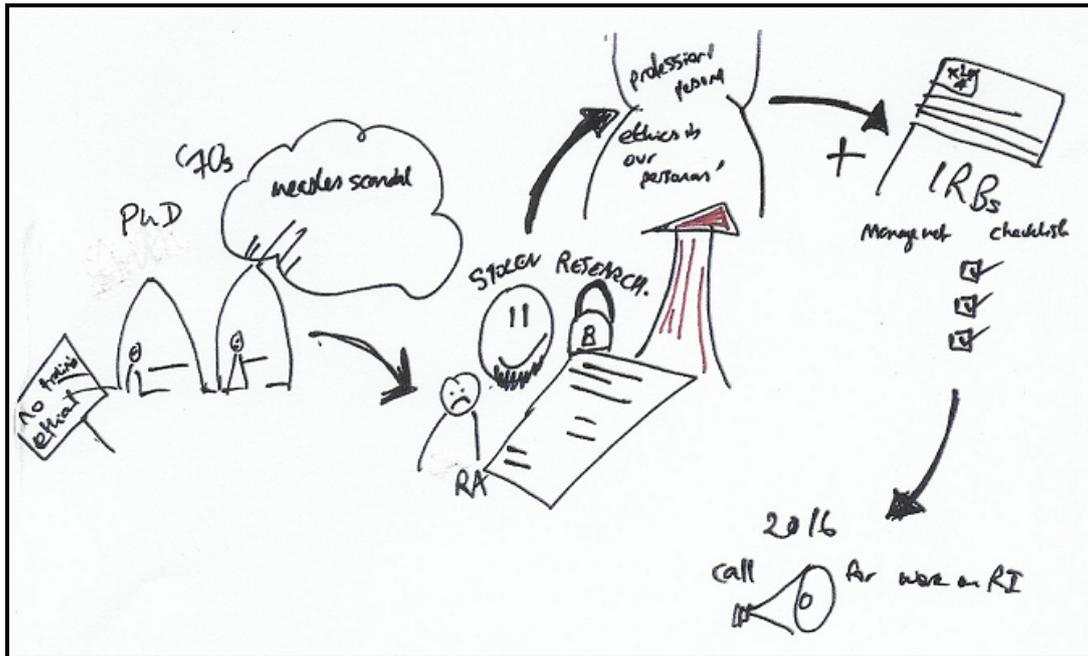
Her first job was as a research assistant (RA) for a professor (depicted with a beard). She as responsible for designing and running a major government-funded research project over four years. At the end, the professor published the results in his own name without acknowledging her research. When she found out, there was nothing she could do to get her work acknowledged. It had been stolen and the system was impenetrable (hence the padlock). Her career progressed nonetheless, (the upward arrow) and she taught about ethics as being constantly aware and self-questioning, moment to moment, day to day, about the social and political impacts of every aspect of a research process. She saw ethics as integral to a social scientist's persona and inherent to a researcher's professionalism. But, initially in the U.S., people began referring to 'having ethics', meaning they had submitted their research plans to an IRB board and had received approval. It was as if 'ethics' was parked in a piece of paper, and was no longer the daily concern of the researcher. Increasingly, 'ethics' was turned into a bureaucratic process, which involved filling forms, ticking boxes, and gaining official 'approval'. When in 2016, there was a call for research on 'research integrity', this term was new to her. She found that a global network of activists, new 'Codes' and bureaucratic procedures, and training in integrity had sprung up. She was still uncertain how 'integrity' related to 'having ethics', let alone to the formation of a critically reflexive professional persona; and she was equally uncertain whether either could have forestalled the scandals of the 1970s or the academic theft that she had experienced in the 1980s.

More than a dozen such narratives and drawings were displayed on the wall and the windows and Rachel Douglas-Jones narrated each of the processes in which the participants had been involved, and recalled key points that were raised in individual stories (thereby turning them into case

studies). She highlighted a number of overarching themes for the plenary discussion. These included:

- All participants had needed a system to support research integrity at some point in their careers. But few had found the support they needed, whether the issue concerned unethical interpersonal behaviour, management failures, inappropriate institutional structures, or problems of data protection and academic theft.
- There was a temporal dimension, as issues of research integrity were tied into, and affected people's careers.
- Participants made explicit ethical statements about the purpose of academic work being to make things better for others, whether through teaching and supporting students, or though righting wrongs.
- However, concepts and practices differed so much between disciplines that is was inappropriate to produce research integrity templates for international collaborations.

The final session focused on the question:

What is at stake in 'Research Integrity' – What is gained or lost? What would be optimal for the future?

Based on the collective history, this session opened a debate about what aspects of current educational and institutional practices are being changed, what is gained, was anything being lost, what did participants want for the future?

Main themes from the collective history
The main themes were power and vulnerability.

Power in Supervision. One clear storyline was that those now teaching integrity had felt very vulnerable at earlier stages in their own careers. There were examples of supervisors publishing students' work as their own or PIs exploiting post docs and damaging their careers. Many of these examples involved gender relations and were about abuses of power in close working relations.

Power in research communities. If there had been someone external to go to, some of the vulnerabilities in relation to supervisors might have been resolved – although the one case where a dean intervened did not change the situation. If an issue is taken through a formal institutional process, the complainant still needs to continue working with the people who are threatening him or her. "Researchers work in communities: you need to have a close knit and trustworthy community in order to have someone to go and talk to. Having a named person in the sky is not necessarily always the best". It is impossible, institutionally, *not* to work with people but institutional processes for handling "informal integrity" are a "grey zone".

Power of institutions to individualize. A local manager, e.g. head of a doctoral program, needs standards for managing relations between colleagues or supervisors and students. Managers and committees only deal with problems as individual cases, whereas they need to be dealt with on a larger scale. Community relations are important to put right. The point is how to set up good relationships for research not just how to deal with individual people.

Power of language. People felt they had encountered "integrity" in the past but had not been aware what it was because there was no language to address this issue. "When I was a PhD student we didn't have a language to discuss e.g. how to deal with a supervisor". "It's important to address the word, and to operationalize it"

Powerlessness. If junior colleagues' work has long been in danger of being stolen by a supervisor, one example was given of an established researcher finding that two Chinese researchers had stolen her article and inserted themselves as authors on Research Gate. They had kept her as a co-author!! It was nigh on impossible to get Research Gate to put that right. Where to go when authorship is stolen – to Research Gate or the journal itself?

Power of researchers to protect their own integrity. Is it just about controlling the conduct of research or also about the right of researchers to protect their integrity against unscrupulous demands put on them? There were cases raising questions about research freedom: what research could external funders buy from the researcher, the pressures for getting results, and restrictions on what researchers can and cannot publish.

Power of external funders. Break the arrogance of power that some institutions think they have. E.g. Dandy case of a chewing gum company that did not like the researchers' results so they changed them. This led to framework agreements and an ethics debate at Copenhagen University.

Power of narrative. Who has the right to represent research done in the institution? There was an example of a researcher's findings being manipulated in the press release issued by the university. What happens if you protest?

The power of scandal. The Danish academic world refers to 'Before and after Penkova'. Penkova was a huge star, we don't know everything that went on, but the idea of medical research as the model to follow for research integrity and ethics evaporated overnight. (Previously it was impossible to raise problems with the medical model – e.g. a story of a control group who felt cheated because they received no treatment, but they had signed a consent form so their feelings were illegitimate.)

Big institutions riding roughshod over small institutions. There was an example of a long negotiation between a large research institution and a UC over collaborative research. The UC tried to protect its researchers' rights: the researchers wanted to try and win the research contract but also be responsible for, and control, their own research. The large institution changed the wording in legal documents after they had been agreed.

Power of International standards. The national code came about when dreams for global codes could not be realized. "When you have global standards that moves people in the right direction". When people move with their research across borders, it is important to have a common language, harmonization, and the legislation to make it mandatory.

Tools for management: Before a project begins, it is useful to have consortium contracts that clearly set out decision making, ownership of results, authorship protocols about who has the right to publish in what order, and data sharing discussions. Fewer problems arise when there is a framework for handling these issues.

Overlapping and top-down codexes. There is a confusing array of overlapping frameworks: professional ethics, ethical clearance, datatilsyn, praksisudvalg, the study of vulnerable subjects and the limits of the biomedical model. Managers try to use codexes as tools for managing and handling a situation. This 'turned a regime of trust into one of distrust and reliance on external rules'. An example concerned a small profession that grew up outside research contexts and merged with a UC. UC leaders who were not research trained, now had to raise external funding and BFI points, so they have a research codex, science ethics committee, data management laws, but they don't yet have the capacity to handle all these things.

Training and professionalism. How do you *make integrity local* – rather than something applied top-down? Rather than teaching a philosophical approach to research that cuts across disciplines, how to root it in each discipline? Is ethics a set of rules to police us or to challenge us on a professional level about how we think? One participant faced decisions being made on the standards of another discipline. Medical standards measure all other disciplines, rather than 'what are the challenges in your particular discipline'.

Split between codes and daily practices. Should the power to define research practice come top down or locally? An example was how practices set up by an RCR split a teacher between being loyal to the institution and 'easing things' for PhDs. Courses do not deal with things on a daily level, and top management does not know what's going on in daily practice. By teaching the RCR course, the teacher found dilemmas and shortcomings in the processes in place.

Outcomes from the final plenary discussion – how they will be used in the project

The final discussion pulled many of the above themes together: what is at stake in 'integrity', what is being gained or lost, and what issues are important for the future?

Formal codes and procedures can be helpful, but not if they lead to making 'people' the nature of the problem. Integrity cannot be managed just by regulation and control.

Research integrity is a matter of trust, and that depends on the conditions and relationships for doing research (between PhD students, supervisors, project Principal Investigators, heads of PhD schools, deans). Informal relationships are crucial but are not covered by the apparatus.

The role of heads of departments is crucial. A local management is needed that knows what is going on and can discuss integrity, gender and power relations with Principal Investigators and others, and help create a mutually supportive research environment, in which cheating is *infra dig*.

A major concern was that managers' attention was being directed towards creating the appearance of impressive results for government and the public, rather than securing the conditions for good research.

A focus on standards prompted managers to ensure that they lived up to the details of regulations and standards and show that they had done all they could; the problem is then attributed to 'people' or to workers' culture. But the focus on audit and checklists takes the attention in the wrong direction and creates the very problems of the workers' culture – the erosion of trust and of the institutional forms of self and mutual regulation on which academic work relies.

The codes and procedures lead to an individualising of research integrity, whereas the point is to generate strong communities where people know and support each other and thereby cut down the space for people to do nasty things.

For the future the need is to create a new narrative about the nature of the problem that would redirect attention to the informal relationships of power that are integral to doing research.

Academics' voices are not part of the narrative construction of 'the problem'. There is a strong international network of people involved in the World Conferences and who develop national codes. In Denmark there are signs of a network among RCR administrators, who are sharing documents and experiences. There is not a network among academics who are responsible for PhD schools, teaching 'integrity' courses or supervising PhD students. Our project has also mainly managed to engage with and mobilise 'para-academics'.

One of the aims of the project's final conference should be to foster such a network among academics, so that they can have a stronger voice in debates within the integrity field. The workshop had shown that the codes and procedures do not always help them deal with issues where a PhD student's research integrity is at stake, especially where these concern power relationships and the local research environment. There are few channels for academics' experiences to help shape often individualised and top down procedures.