
Conflict of Interest

TRANSCRIPT

Research Ethics Online Course

1. Conflict of Interest
2. This lecture explores conflict of interest, what it is, why it matters and how to manage it.
3. Conflict of interest has everything to do with what influences the results you present or the way you do your research. Typically the answers relate to pre-existing knowledge in the field and theories that are already in existence; or your observations and analysis; or the calculations you have made, or the results you have produced. These are all very much appropriate influences on your research.
4. Alternatively, your results and way of doing research can be influenced by the funding structures and sources by funders influencing how the research is carried out, what results are desirable or how results can be shared with others. In addition, you could be influenced by opportunities or gifts attached to certain projects, methodologies or ways of presenting results. Sometimes we are influenced also by others whether it is by their convincing argument or by the power they hold over us and sometimes we are influenced by our own ambitions for our research career. All of these create potential conflict of interest
5. Conflict of interest is serious business. The Finnish Guidelines states: Sources of financing, conflicts of interest or other commitments relevant to the conduct of research are announced to all members of the research project and reported when publishing the research results.
6. Similarly the Singapore statement highlights conflict of interest by stating that the Researchers should disclose financial and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work in research proposals, publications and public communications as well as in all review activities.
7. In addition, the European Union Code of Conduct on research integrity highlights Impartiality and independence from commissioning or interested parties, from ideological or political pressure groups, and from economic or financial interests.
8. So why is this so important? The importance lies on the relationship where on the one side you will find the research community and on the other side the rest of the society. The research community wants to share their results with the society which in return gives resources to the research community. This relationship is based on trust. The society trusts that the research community shares results that are true, honest and representing exactly what they are said to represent. Conflict of interest threatens this trust. If the society can no longer trust the results the research community presents, the entire foundations of the research community erodes. Eventually there would be no reason for the rest of the society to consider the research

community as an important part of the society. Results would have no meaning unless they are based on what the presented methodologies suggest they are based on. So without trust or the honesty of research results there really is no place for research in the society.

9. So how should you consider the conflict of interest in your work? Most journals require you to formally declare any conflict of interest. At minimal level that refers to declaring all sources of funding for your research project. This makes sense as funding can have a significant impact on how we do our research work. We only have to look back on the influence of tobacco industry funding research on the health impact of smoking. Alternatively you could write a subjectivity statement. Subjectivity statements is a more informal document as a summary of everything that influences your research. These should include funding, your beliefs, reflections on your culture, the social groups you belong to, and any existing knowledge you have on the subject. Below you will find further information on how to write a subjectivity statement.