Working with others

TRANSCRIPT

Research Ethics Online Course

1. Working with others in the research context requires finding common ground - that is often about finding and agreeing on common values, goals and processes that make the project and interaction possible. In this lecture we will look at the different areas where ethical challenges appear in our research work with others and how we can stop them from becoming ethical problems.

2. One way to look at the interaction is to consider the way we work with others according to different tiers. The first tier is within our own research community - this can be understood as your research group, your research field or your research institutions/university. Essentially this tier is inhabited by others who also do research. A second tier of interaction includes those with those who make our research possible - these are the sources of funding, our research subjects, organisations giving our research a place to develop and be carried out. The third tier are the would-be users of the research results - this would be businesses, policy makers and individuals. In this lecture, the focus will be on the first tier of internal collaboration. The second tier will be looked at during the discussion on funding and the third tier will be explored more closely in the last module.

3. In most instances research interaction is influenced by multiple different values, norms and assumptions. These are introduced by individuals having diverse values. The research groups and fields also have their own sets of values, assumptions and norms on how research interaction is best arranged. These groups further belong into institutions which also have distinct values, assumptions and norms on what is important in research and how research practice is best organised.

4. When you add to this mix the inevitable impact of different cultures on the values, norms and assumptions, it is easy to see how complexity is introduced to research interaction.

5. At the same time, all the researchers also belong to the research community, which has created its own values, assumptions and norms. This community gives us a baseline on what is negotiable and what is not, when we work out how to collaborate with others.

6. Research collaboration is incredibly multi-faceted. Our values, norms and assumptions influence at least the following aspects of research work and thus create the potential

for ethical challenges to develop:

i. How we divide time between different tasks - how long is your working day and how much of it is dedicated to research and how much to other tasks like teaching or administration. Who can decide what your day looks like?

ii. How is the project defined - who chooses methodology, goals, and timeframe for the research?

iii. What happens if people disagree?

iv. How is the research going to be published? Which journals, when and who are the authors?

v. How are new ideas dealt with? Who decides which ideas will be followed?

vi. Who is responsible for each part of the project? How is that decided? What is done if someone does not do their job?

7. Whose responsibility is it to make sure things get done? How are challenges resolved? Who takes responsibility to make decisions, deal with conflicts, and help people get along? How do you communicate? Which channels, how often and who initiates communication?It is probably easy for you to see these aspects in your own research reality and reflect where there is good alignment with values, norms and assumptions and where potential for problems is greater.

8. There are no simple rules or guidelines how to find common values, agree on common goals and define shared processes. The path of finding a shared base to work from is valuable and helpful in itself. When you start on the path of working together it is beneficial to consider some basic aspects of ethical behaviour. In this lecture these topics are only touched upon and there is a link to an article by Petteri Niemi below that will give you more information on them.

i. Firstly, we have a tendency to do things as we have always done them in other words, routinise our actions. Routines may work well in most instances, but need to be checked regularly if they still serve their purpose and particularly when dealing with a new situation.

ii. Secondly, we are always influenced by the situation we are in - be that the structures of our organisation, the power relationships within our group or what has happened to us that very morning. Being aware of how situations, people and experiences constantly influence our ethical thinking and how we interact with others (and how others interact with us) helps us to create better interaction.

iii. Thirdly, our thinking is never completely objective - we are biased by our previous beliefs, by the methodology we use, and plainly how our brains work. Recognising our biases will reduce their power in our thinking and allow us to make more justified ethical decisions.

iv. And lastly, we often morally disengage from situations by thinking it is not our business to do anything about the problems and even more so that it is someone else's responsibility.

9. So what would a roadmap for easier collaboration look like?

    i) Firstly, you would be in the best position to collaborate if you were aware of your own ethical thinking and its limitations.

    ii) Secondly, interactions with others will be easiest if minimal assumptions are made and potential issues are discussed openly and transparently. Each group and research collective should explore their common values, goals and processes by which they believe these are best achieved.

    iii) Lastly, to have the courage to start these conversations. The earlier in the interaction they are had, the lesser the risk of ethical problems appearing. It is everyone's responsibility to raise issues and point out to ethical challenges when they appear.

10. It is also good to remember that all collaboration takes place within the research reality that is currently often characterised by fierce and increased competition for funding, positions and publications. This may place people in a position where they feel their ability to do the right thing is compromised if they wish to get ahead academically. Stress and fear are challenging partners in any collaboration and recognising them will allow other decision-making criteria and methods to develop as well.