



Promoting Integrity as an Integral Dimension of Excellence in Research

Misconduct cases: research protocol

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Authors	Willem Halfman, Radboud University Nijmegen



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1. Rationale

The third work package of the Printeger project includes a task that involves detailed case studies of cases of misconduct. There are two objectives for these case studies

- To gather **illustrative** material for use in educational tools for early career scientists (in WP5). Hence cases are not just about ‘pointing out obvious wrong behaviour’, but illustrate the dilemmas and tensions in research that lead to dubious practices, the tensions between different principles or guidelines, point out how misconduct cases can develop (e.g. the dynamic of ‘scandal’), or the complications of whistle blowing.
- To look for **patterns** in the development of misconduct cases in terms of the personal dynamics of fraud, in light of the tensions arising from work conditions, such as pressures or research culture. (A specific focus in light of information gathered in the context of other work packages.)

This case study protocol specifies how cases are to be defined and selected, which information needs to be gathered, and which methods are to be used to do so.

This document formalises the agreements made about the cases studies at the Oslo meeting in August 2016.

The protocol applies to the case studies of individual misconduct cases. The two cases produced by CWTS (Leiden Univ.) are excluded from this protocol, as they are of scientific journal policies and hence of a different order, even though some principles will still be useful (e.g. format).

We are fully aware that individual misconduct cases can be sensitive, may be rare, and may be very hard to research. The following protocol should therefore be read as a description of ideal cases, which may not be achievable in practice.

Please consult with Willem Halffman when in doubt.

2. Case definition

2.1. Unit of analysis

Unit of analysis: individual researcher misconduct

The unit of analysis is an individual researcher’s case of scientific misconduct. This means: an individual researcher (possibly involving a team of close collaborators) who was caught or accused of misconduct (and possibly exonerated), along with antecedents/context, and aftermath. Obviously, the story will involve other people, such as colleagues, team members, perhaps journalists, or regulatory agencies, but the descriptions should be organised around the story of a researcher committing/being accused of some form of research fraud.

The story: thick description of case development

The case description should describe the origins, discovery/accusation, and aftermath of misconduct cases and include contextual information on the researchers, research context, or institutional context (specified further below). Even though the unit of analysis is a case of misconduct of an individual researcher, the information should provide a detailed description of its context.

Time frame: months to several years

As much as possible, the case should be described as it developed, from before the discovery



(reconstruction of the research and research context that involved alleged wrong-doing), via discovery or accusation, to the following social reaction, to eventual resolution. Some information of the career path of the researcher(s) involved will also be relevant. Hence the time frame of the information collected will be typically in the order of several years, although the specific delimitation will depend on the case at hand.

2.2. Case selection

The case selection should aim for diversity (even though the limited number of cases will not be able to achieve full representativity of all sciences) and for meaningful comparability, pointing at a few factors we know are of influence on the development of misconduct cases. For the diversity of cases, case selection should aim for variation in the nature of cases between the partners. For the comparability, case selection should aim for similarity of cases between partners.

Factors for comparability

A series of factors are highly likely to be of influence on the development of misconduct cases and can most realistically be used to select cases, *even though this may not be entirely possible in practice.*

a) High/low status researcher

Each partner should aim to select a case involving misconduct by a high-status scientist, e.g. successful full professor, possibly in leadership position. Ideally, the second case should involve a more junior or lower status scientist.

b) High/low public attention

Each partner should aim to select a case involving misconduct that led to media controversy or public attention, possibly leading to public concern or even regulatory action. The other case should involve relatively invisible misconduct, handled informally or through administrative procedure and without much media exposure. (Evidently, these kinds of cases are much harder to find and this may not be entirely achievable.)

c) Clear/contested misconduct

Each partner should aim to select a case involving clear (black&white) misconduct and a case involving debatable misconduct (grey).

Factors for representativity

Between the partners, cases should involve spread of:

- Gender
- Disciplines
- Different forms of misconduct
- Different kinds of research institutes (academic/non-academic etc.)
- (countries – evidently)

Each partner should aim to identify meaningful comparison between their national cases, and may therefore choose to focus on one field or one form of misconduct (eg The Netherlands: plagiarism), but the overall project should have a sufficiently diverse set of cases. **In order to assure maximum spread, partners should suggest a short list of cases to the coordinator to consult about final case selection.**



	case	Comparative			Representative			
		status	Visible	contest	field	gender	instit	form
RU-NL	Nijkamp	high	high	high	Economics	male	univ	Self-plagiarism
RU-NL	VA	low	low	low	Social Sci	female	univ	Plagiarism
VUB-BE	V. Calster?	?	high	?		male	univ	?
VUB-BE								
CEUT-Est								
CEUT-Est								
HIOA-NO								
HIOA-NO								
UT-IT								
UT-IT								
UBriUK								
UBriUK								
LU-Int	journal							
LU-Int	journals							

This table needs to be filled based on preliminary exploration of possibilities by partners.

For further guidance on case study design, see: Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Fifth Edition ed.): Sage.



3. Case description

3.1 Structure of the case description

Overall structure

The case description should follow a largely chronological order, describing the alleged misconduct, its origins, how it was reported or came to light, and what the social response was.

- Form and origin of the allegation: e.g. did it involve a whistle blower, an official procedure or was it revealed in the media, what was the accusation and form of misconduct, did the culprit admit/deny/fight back, were other researchers involved or victimised...
- Antecedents and contextual info (see below): were there prior problems discovered later? One-off or structural? What was the research context like (big group/small group, hierarchical, competitive field/lab or not, successful/struggling), how successful was the researcher (career, recognition, success at fund raising, ...)
- Official processing of the allegation(s), procedure: how was the case dealt with? Which procedures were followed, if any? E.g. where investigative committees installed and what did they find?
- Who got involved? Media? (Newspapers? Tv? University newspapers?) Politics? Scientific organisations such as academies, journal editors, university boards, ...
- How did actors interpret or legitimise the case? Please pay specific attention to how actors involved portrayed the case, e.g. 'everybody else does it' defence by accused, or 'this is proof of publication pressure', or 'this is endangering the reputation of science', or other interpretations of the case in media or other debate.
- Response to the allegation and conclusions of official processing: what was the verdict on the case (in the media, in procedures, in courts,...)
- The consequences of the case: for regulations, personal, organisations. E.g. did the case result in new guidelines, convictions, restitution, articulation of rules, ...
- Please pay special attention to changed policies, policy/organisational/personal learning, or changes in research practices in the field concerned.

Contextual information

a) Personal level

Personal biography and career of accused researcher, background of other researchers involved

b) Organisational level

Characterisation of organisation culture: hierarchy, performance pressure, competition, task uncertainty (ambiguity over proper research) control systems and attention for integrity (and perception by researchers)

c) Field level

Pressure, competitiveness (e.g. priority races, opportunities, funding options), anonymity (large field or small specialist community)

d) National research system

Competitiveness, management/policy style, e.g. New Public Management and output steering?



3.2. Tone

Case descriptions should be factual and non-normative (non-judgmental), even though the case description may point out facts of grave potential consequence (e.g. endangered patients) and the case report may conclude with a normative assessment. However, the focus of the analysis should be with how the actors judged the case, not us as researchers.

4. Data sources and methods

Documents

- University / personal webpages of researchers
- Investigation reports by university- or national organisations, offices and committees
- Media (papers, tv, magazines)
- Scientific publications covering the case
- Blogs by science journalists / scientists
- Contested publications themselves
- Legal documents, if relevant
- ...

Qualitative interviews with actors involved, as far as possible

- researchers involved (accused, colleagues, whistle-blowers)
- Research organisation leaders/managers
- Investigators (review boards, journalists)

Obviously, some of these interviews may be extremely sensitive and researchers should use their discretion and remain neutral as much as possible. As a very general indication, we aim for between five and ten interviews per case.

Interviews may be recorded and transcribed for analysis, but this information should not be shared beyond the local team of researchers. Research reports should be anonymised, unless if names of key actors were already widely divulged in the media (researcher discretion). In any case, research should aim to avoid stigmatisation, not aim to expose more misconduct, or accuse anyone involved.

This neutrality and anonymity, as well as principles of informed consent, nature of the project and aim of the study should be explained to respondents prior to the interview, in accordance with national regulations and principles of research ethics.

For interviews, a list of questions should be composed prior to the interview. These will most likely be highly specific for the case and for the person interviewed, but can nevertheless be shared on the project's Dropbox to allow for coordination with other research teams.

Interviews should be conducted in correspondence with standard practice in qualitative social science research. In case of doubt, detailed instructions can be found in handbooks such as:

Quinn Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Please include a brief footnote on how you collected material, number of interviews, media search, or other methodological choices that were made.



5. Report format and practicalities

5.1. Length

The length of case reports will be influenced by the nature of the case. Evidently, highly controversial cases will generate more material.

As a rough indication, reports should vary between 10-15 pages. In case of doubt, please consult with Willem Halfman.

5.2. Timing

As indicated in the proposal and GANNT chart, the case descriptions should be finished by **1 Feb. 2017**, to allow for timely integration of case studies in the final report.

5.3. Sources

Please be very precise in indicating sources of your empirical material.

- Of documents, including newspapers and internet: please follow the Printeger standard (Chicago 16th with footnotes)
- Of interviews: "Interview with [person], [time and date], [place]." The name of the person can obviously be anonymised, e.g. "Researcher X", "Journalist Y", in extremis even "X". Even if fully anonymised, please still refer to the source, so it is clear the information came from which particular anonymous interview.

5.4. Extra material for educational purposes

Since the cases will be used in the development in educational materials in WP5, please include any other materials that could be useful, for example in a Powerpoint format. These could include:

- A timeline of events
- Pictures, e.g. actors involved, newspaper headlines, media reports
- Graphics representing the misconduct involved (manipulated data, plagiarised text,...)
- If available, film fragments such as news reports would be fantastic (if needed, we will explore possibilities of subtitling in English)

Please remember to add proper sources for such material, as well as copyright limitations if these apply.