Applying Insights from the Field of Behavioral Economics to the Institutional Management of Research Integrity: A Critical Analysis of Approaches Following a Misconduct-Related Event

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5th World Conference on Research Integrity
Amsterdam, Netherlands
May 29, 2017
University of Minnesota

Controversial decision-making

Suicide of a patient
How do institutional responses to misconduct directly address researcher behavior?
Data Collection

4 Research Institutions

4 countries

Experienced a serious case of misconduct (FFP) in the last decade
Data Collection

Four in-depth interviews.

Document analysis.
Institutional Responses to Misconduct

A. Policy
B. Training
C. Oversight
A. Policy

Audit of RI policies

Explicit rules & clarification of processes.
A. Policy

“Safer” reporting

Whistleblower protections
B. Training

Graduate student requirements

Online Instruction
B. Training

Training events and workshops
C. Oversight

New Oversight Boards Created
C. Oversight

Data package requirements

Audit Process
What can behavioral economics tell us about researcher decision-making?

AND

What insights can be used to promote an environment of integrity?
Behavioral Economics

Psychology

Economics
Decrease Integrity

- First immoral act

Adapted from:
Decrease Integrity

- Depletion

“tired brain”

Adapted from:
Decrease Integrity

- Culture of dishonesty

“In many areas of life, we look to others to learn what behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate” (Ariely, 2012).

Adapted from:
No Effect

- $ to be gained
- Probability of getting caught

Adapted from:
Increase Integrity

- Commitment

Adapted from:
Increase Integrity

- Moral Reminders

Adapted from:
Increase Integrity

- Culture of Honesty

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Interview Question:
What is the most important outcome of the misconduct at the institution?
“The change was such that every student and every professor actually talked about it. It was really, it was a topic on everyone’s minds.”
“How do you as a researcher create checks and balances for yourself to prevent these things from happening.”
Culture Shift

“The committee report was pretty devastating to the culture of the University.”
“Promoted actually being critical of each other instead of just trusting what the other did which goes to much more to promoting good behavior rather than just preventing bad behavior.”
“I think that, in a funny way, that enhanced the University’s’s reputation. No one wants to enhance their reputation through such a dramatic, retraction. But how much better for an institution to come out and say, ‘This thing has happened, we have investigated it, and this is what we are doing about it.’”
“It is always better to shine a light in those dark corners.”
Amsterdam Agenda:
Most important player(s) in promoting integrity

http://www.wcri2017.org/program/amsterdam-agenda
How can institutions use these outcomes as an opportunity?
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In Conclusion

Institutions looking to improve management of research integrity should complement current approaches with strategies focused on influencing the daily decisions of researchers.