Implementing a culture of integrity:
Styles in governing research integrity in university environments

Ulrike Felt
Department of Science and Technology Studies &
Research Platform “Responsible Research and Innovation in Academic Practice”
University of Vienna

6th World Conference on Research Integrity, Hongkong, 2-5 June 2019
Research Integrity

• Research integrity seems to have moved to the top of institutional concerns => Why now? What is in need for protection and how?
• Debates strongly moved to a macro-level with a proliferation of international statements/agreements on research integrity
• However, we know much less about
  • everyday micro-practices within different institutional contexts
  • how stable conventions arise and become a legitimate “social institutions” => need for a parallel cognitive convention to sustain it (Douglas 1986; How institutions think)
• Mid- to long-term impacts of interventions in the system
Project

“Borderlands of good scientific practice: Investigating a global problem in its local versions”

Collaborator: Florentine Frantz

• Multi-sited analysis of research integrity as culture and practice
  • Media narratives
  • Institutional structures put in place to assure good practice (rules and regulation, ombudsman services, sanctions, ...) — document analysis and interviews
  • daily practices of doing “good research” — interviews and card-based engagement exercises (RESPONSE_ABILITY)
Universities and their role

• Universities hold a special position in this debate: they perform research and socialize the next generation of researchers and knowledge workers.

• institutions have responded with codes of conduct and guidelines for good scientific practice (increasing the areas covered by codes; e.g. good practice in policy advice)

• we know much less: how do universities, as collectives, think and know when it comes to good scientific practice? – (how) do they become and stay, both, a value and practice collective?

⇒ explore how institutions think and act in the context of research integrity
Of narratives and practices
How do we share values and concerns?
Narrative Infrastructures of good practice

• Narrative as the essential meaning-making/sense-making mechanism (Czarniawska 2004)
• Narrative infrastructure (Felt 2017): “a network of temporally stabilised narratives through which meanings and values of academic knowledge/work [...] can be articulated, circulated and exchanged across space and time”
Preambels of „good practice documents“

• set both the tone and serve as important moments of contextualisation

• they make a direct relation between assuring research integrity and quality of research; yet, they never speak of “excellent science”, but of “robust scientific work”, that it “fosters the quality of scientific work”, it is “a prerequisite of scientific work”

• Relation of the university to society/the public:
  • „the public“ is an important reference point — generally related to issues of „recognition of scientific work“ as well as „trust in the reliability of scientific results“, „trust received by researchers and institutions of research“
  • „society“ is related to trust, but also more generally to the success of research and innovation;
How do we share values and concerns?
Narrative Infrastructures of good practice

- limited register of such narratives repeated in the context of institutions
  - Linear rational decision model: information on/awareness of rules of good practice will lead researchers “to do the right thing”;  
  - Connected to the narrative of autonomy, institutions see themselves in the need of proactive intervention only “if something has gone wrong” — reaction not action/ex-post model of cleaning up
  - Focus is put on “the next generation” of researchers which can (still) be trained (a one time clearing idea) => unclear idea of socialisation and of cross-generational issues
Absences: What is missing?

Virtually no narratives on

- the **value geographies in which researchers live** and which are contradictory to and competing with ideals of “good practice” — number of publications; rankings; being first; excellence; mobility; .... more generally what gets rewarded
- **avoidance strategies** to address transgressions publicly
- **systematic precarity of work relations during socialisation phase** due to the projectification of research => narrowing the registers of worth (Fochler et al. 2016)
Tension between a “model of management” and a “model of good care”

model of account-ability; only what can be counted counts; value of research (impact, transfer, ...); formular-ization & creation of a bureaucracy of virtue

model focusing on response-ability; reflexivity on how we practice knowledge making; process orientation; values in research

care

management
Care

• answers to the fuzziness and fluidity of research processes and practices in a fast developing and rapidly innovating science system (managerial approaches alone cannot respond to them in a sufficiently flexible manner)

• puts the relational aspects of good practice at the centre — Douglas on “How institutions think”, but also a cross-generational conversation

• focus on processes of enculturation — which never happens solely through taking one class; challenge of mobility and massification of higher education, of “interrupted lives” in science

=> Attention to the “integrity conditions”
Experimental approaches to governing research integrity

Valuation (evaluation) and moral reasoning in research shape regulation and governance; assumptions on legitimate values, rights, duties and responsibilities should be carefully considered; “doing the right things”

Research regulation: shapes governance through formal rules that can be sanctioned; “doing things right”

Research governance is more than the practice of establishing and implementing policies, procedures, and (moral) standards for the responsible development of research.
Concluding reflection

• to organize **experimental governance processes**
  • systematically question own assumptions and practices,
  • treat solutions as incomplete and to be changed, and
  • engage in an ongoing, mutual readjustment of ends and means triggered through comparing with other approaches to achieve a common goal.

⇒ we will need to organize collective learning (and invest the time to do so) of how to best govern research.

⇒ need to better understand what we do when implementing measures to foster good research practice through accompanying studies