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RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Background to this document

The scientific enterprise depends to a large extent on trust. Our researchers trust that the scientific knowledge on which they base their own research is reliable, scrupulous, objective and impartial. In turn, academics from around the globe trust that our researchers apply appropriate methods of inquiry and analysis, report results honestly and accurately and maintain high standards of ethics and integrity themselves as well.

This trust-based quality assurance system requires from everyone involved in research to behave responsibly and ethically. The responsible conduct of research is considered a key priority at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEWEB) of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

This document outlines the research ethics review regulations for conducting scientific research within the context of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. The principles outlined in this document apply to all FEWEB researchers and students, and all persons that are otherwise involved in conducting research related to FEWEB.

- This document should be used as a reference for all scientific personnel involved in research practices, from initial project design throughout the peer review- and publishing process.
- This document should be used as a reference when submitting a research project proposal for ethical clearance at the FEWEB Research Ethics Review Board (RERB).
- This document is complementary to the principles for scientific integrity, that are endorsed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as a whole.¹
- This document can also be used as an educational resource in training (PhD) students and researchers.

¹ Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam endorses the rules for the responsible conduct of research as formulated by the Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW) and the principles outlined in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). At European level, the European Science Foundation (ESF) and All European Academies (ALLEA) recorded an English description of the principles and rules relating to scientific integrity. The documents endorsed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam provide only basic principles for the responsible conduct of research, a uniform interpretation - and hence the practical implementation - of these guidelines are therefore difficult.

1. Ethical principles for doing research with people

1. Research projects are designed and implemented in compliance with the Dutch law, the KNAW Code for Scientific Integrity² and the VSNU Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice.³
2. The registration of personal data takes place in compliance with the Dutch law and VSNU Code of Conduct for the Use of Personal Details in Scientific Practice.⁴
3. During the preparatory phase of the research project, the acceptability of the study is assessed in the light of the current ethical principles, as outlined in this document.
4. Researchers are responsible for an ethical approach to the research conducted by themselves and others under their supervision or responsibility.
5. Researchers and their assistants only perform those tasks for which they were appropriately trained and prepared.
6. In case researchers conduct research outside their home institution, the researcher ensures that, prior to the execution of the study, written consent is obtained from the host institution or other relevant organization where the study will take place. The research project meets the requirements of both the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the host institution. In principle, this does not apply for research in groups in the public space, see section 2.5 "Research in Groups".
7. Researchers take measures to ensure that the rights and welfare of all individuals involved in the research project will not be violated in the study.
8. In case research is conducted in subjects with specific problems (e.g. work stress, depression, physical complaints), researchers acquaint themselves with these problems prior to the start of the research by consulting an expert in the field of the relevant problem.

²KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) Code for Scientific Integrity, 2014 ([link](#))

³VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, 2004, revision 2012 ([link](#))

⁴VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) The Netherlands Code of Conduct for the Use of Personal Details in Scientific Practice, 2005, (in Dutch) ([link](#))

2. Application of the ethical principles

2.1 Human relations

1. In work-related activities, researchers do not engage in unfair discrimination based on gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, national origin, political views, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.
2. Researchers refrain from using methods that 1) affect the dignity of the subjects or 2) interfere with the private lives of the subjects more than is necessary for the intended purpose of the study.
3. Researchers do not engage in any behaviour that can be reasonably assessed as unwelcome, offensive or intimidating, including sexual solicitation, physical advances or verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature or demeaning to persons with whom they interact, based on factors such as mentioned in 2.1.1.

2.2 Recruitment of subjects and informed consent

1. Subjects are individuals, who voluntarily participate in a study and whose actions and / or thinking could be influenced by the research. Groups of people who are merely observed in public spaces are not subjects.
2. Prior to the execution of the study, the researchers inform the subjects and / or their legal representatives about what they can expect during the investigation. This information is presented to the subject by means of a written information letter or brochure. Subjects are informed in understandable language about the purpose and methods of the study. For subjects who cannot read, the directive under 2.2 ad 5 applies.
3. Researchers inform prospective participants about the fact that their participation is voluntary and that they may refuse to participate in research or to cease participation without a statement of reasons. Researchers inform participants about important factors which may affect their willingness to participate (such as risks, discomfort, adverse effects, or limitations on confidentiality) and explain other aspects relating to questions of future subjects. Researchers inform the subject about the method of reporting back the research results and the nature of the research to be reported back to the subject.
4. The subject is given ample opportunity to read the information provided by the researcher, and to ask the researcher questions about his or her participation and the content of the study.
5. Based on the content of the information letter or brochure and the information provided orally by the investigator, the subject is asked for his or her consent. The agreement of the subject to participate in the study is based on *active informed consent*. Active informed consent means that the participant performs an action to confirm his participation. This is preferably a signature on a form, but can also concern a digital action, for example, clicking a "tick-box", pressing a button or clicking on a link, as long as it happens on the basis of information provided by the researcher.

6. In case of *passive informed consent*, the participant must perform an action to show that he or she does *not* want to participate in the study. In general, passive informed consent is regarded as undesirable by FEWEB.⁵ Researchers who wish to make use of passive informed consent should consult the FEWEB Research Ethics Review Board.
7. In some cases concerning the study of groups, researchers may deviate from asking individual informed consent, see section 2.5 "Research in Groups".
8. Children (<18 years) and persons incapable of judgment may only be involved in the study if there are no alternatives for obtaining data and if the research is focused on gaining a better scientific understanding and treatment of these subjects. In addition, the condition must be stated that the burden on the subjects is minimal. Researchers provide an appropriate explanation of the situation where possible. In all these cases, it is necessary to gain informed consent from the legal representatives of the subjects (see 2.2 ad 6).
9. In the case of studies in children younger than 12 years, a letter of consent shall be signed by the legal representative of the child. In the case of studies in children aged 12 years and older, the letter of consent will be signed by both the child and the legal representative. In general, a consent letter signed by a single parent is sufficient, unless the nature of the study reasonably requires the consent of both parents. In the case of incapacitated subjects, permission must be obtained from the legal representative of the person, regardless of the age of the subject. Investigators may also obtain the consent of the subject itself. In the case of research with children or young people in a group, see section 2.5 "Research in Groups".
10. In case researchers conduct research with human subjects who somehow depend on them, such as FEWEB students, they take precautions to protect them against the adverse consequences of premature termination or denial of participation. In case participation in the relevant study is a mandatory part of the education or training of the subject, or a possibility to obtain study credits, the subject is offered the choice of alternatives. If students refuse to take part in a study that is a mandatory part of the education or training of the subject, or provides a possibility to obtain study credits on moral or religious grounds, the subject is offered the choice of alternatives.
11. When rewards or services are offered as consideration for participation in the study in order to recruit subjects, the researchers communicate the nature of the rewards and/or services and clearly communicate the potential risks, obligations and limitations associated with these services.
12. Researchers do not offer excessive or inappropriate financial or other incentives to recruit subjects.

⁵ Passive informed consent is undesirable because, firstly, it is not clear whether the participant has received the information, and secondly because the participant for any reason may have been unable to act against his or her participation. This can lead to violation of the rights and autonomy of the individual.

2.3 Working with personal details⁶

1. Researchers treat personal details with confidentiality and store them in compliance with the Dutch law and VSNU Code of Conduct for the Use of Personal Details in Scientific Practice.⁷
2. The privacy of the subject should be respected; Personal data should be considered confidential. Personal information that could lead to the identification of the subject should be kept separate and disconnected from the collected research data.
3. Researchers only use personal details for the purpose(s) for which they were collected, as formulated and communicated by the researcher to the subject prior to the start of the study.
4. Researchers do not pass on personal information to third parties without the consent of the subject. The transmission of personal data to third parties may only take place for the purpose of scientific research and requires written consent of the subject itself.
5. If a researcher manages a systematic database with directly identifiable personal data over a longer period of time, the researcher should verify whether the database should be registered with the Data Protection Authority (Dutch: College Bescherming Persoonsgegevens) in accordance with the Dutch law.⁸
6. Researchers should take appropriate technical and organizational measures to prevent any unauthorized access to data in order to preclude the inappropriate use, theft or loss of personal details and research data (e.g. using lockable cabinets, passwords, encryption techniques, and keeping track of who has access to the data).

2.4. Research procedures

1. Researchers use methods and / or take measures to limit the risk of mental or physical harm of the subject. At an increased risk of psychological or physical harm to the subject the researcher should present his or her research plans to the METC of VUMC for ethical examination prior to the start of the research project.⁹ An increased risk means a risk greater than one can reasonably expect in a normal life situation.
2. Researchers ensure that they will fulfill all the commitments that they have agreed with the subjects. This applies to the arrangements laid down in the information letter or brochure and verbal agreements made before, during or after the study.
3. Researchers refrain from conducting any forms of research that entails deception, unless the use of deception is justified by the scientific, educational, or applied value to be expected from the study. Deception will only take place if equally effective procedures in which no deception occurs are not possible. The researcher must demonstrate and

⁶ Personal details: Any information concerning an identified or identifiable natural person.

⁷ VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) Gedragscode voor gebruik van persoonsgegevens in wetenschappelijk onderzoek ([link](#))

⁸ Please visit the website of the Data Protection Authority for more information ([link](#))

⁹ Please visit the website of the VUmc Medical Ethical Committee for more information ([link](#))

prove the necessity of his working method in this respect. Subjects are not misled about possible risks and inconveniences that participation in the study might entail. Any form of deception that forms an essential feature of the design and implementation of the study, must be explained to participants as soon as possible. This is preferably done at the end of their participation, but not later than by the end of the study.

4. Researchers inform subjects prior to the study about what personal research details they will receive at the end of the study. Researchers grant subjects access to all information gathered about them, to the extent that it has not yet been fully anonymized, or where no personally identifiable information about others is released by referring to other participants in the study than themselves.
5. Researchers explain the subjects about the gathered details in a clear, understandable way and seek to correct obvious misconceptions that participants may have afterwards.
6. Researchers give participants the opportunity to obtain information about the nature, results and conclusions of the research. This concerns a general research report in which no individual data are released. The reporting to subjects happens in a clear and comprehensible manner.
7. When scientific or human values justify the delaying or withholding of information to third parties, researchers take appropriate measures to limit the possible risk of harm and / or damage that may occur as a consequence of this. Researchers inform subjects about this prior to the study.
8. The privacy of the subject should be respected; Personal data should be considered confidential. Personal data will be kept separated from research data and protected against improper use (see also section 2.2).
9. Researchers shall ensure that the presentation of research data, in whatever form, is done anonymously.
10. Research data is kept until the purpose for which the data was collected has been achieved and a report is completed. The researcher and head of the research department are responsible for the safe storage of the data. If a subject objects to the use of his or her data, it will immediately be destroyed, (as long as the mentioned data are not yet used in publications). In case a subject objects about the use of his or her data by the time the research data is already published, the researcher must anonymize the personal details of the subject and destroy any references that can lead to the personal identification of the subject. The (anonymous) data set itself must be kept for at least 5 years after publication, in accordance with international guidelines in science. If it is decided not to publish the data, it may be destroyed earlier.
11. When data is retrieved by other scientists or experts, researchers ensure that the privacy of the subjects is protected. Databases are anonymised before data is shared with others. If research data that could lead to the personal identification of the subject are exchanged, the researcher must obtain written permission from the subject (see section 2.1). With regard to the other points in these guidelines, informed consent is not required when the investigation relates to fully anonymised data sets or field observations without manipulations.

12. Researchers must obtain written consent from subjects to use recorded images and sound recordings (photo, video, audio or other behavioural registrations) made of the subjects for the purpose of the study. This does not apply for pencil drawings and sound recordings recorded during open field observations in public spaces, and for other recordings of which the registration is not expected to lead personal identification of human beings.
13. In case of 2.4.12, researchers should make a separate request (for example via a so-called opt-out) for the use of video and audio recordings for presentations and educational purposes.

2.5 Research in Groups

Research in the various disciplines of Business Administration can relate to group processes, or the effect of a change in a situation in a large group of people. Examples include research about general interactions between professionals at work, the effects of management techniques on productivity in the workplace, or the effect of the working environment on employee's behaviour. In the study of groups of people, it is not always possible or desirable (awareness of participation may influence the behaviour of the individual) to obtain consent of each studied individual, while in some cases research data may not be obtained in a different way than through a group study. In such cases, the researcher may request an exception for individual informed consent for the purpose of data collection, and study group behaviour without obtaining individual written consent, under certain conditions:

1. By mere observation of behaviour in public spaces (e.g. street, campus) it is not required to obtain individual informed consent, as long as no personal data is collected and the research cannot be traced back to specific individuals. Note that the usage of audio or video recordings could lead to the identification of an individual. Audio and video recordings may therefore be used only if individuals are unrecognizable or obscured.
2. In other cases, informed consent is obtained from the relevant body or authority, for example, the management of the institution which is studied.
3. Research entails the observation of the daily setting of the sample group, in which the individual privacy and autonomy is not limited or compromised. If the effect of a management method is studied, this should be a method which is developed or approved by the institution itself, and carried out with its permission and under its supervision.
4. Research methods and observations are announced to relevant groups (including parents and/or other legal representatives) unless it might endanger the purpose of the study. In case of the latter, the researcher must justify this by demonstrating the significance of not communicating his / her research methods for the purpose of his / her study.
5. Interventions / working methods take place at the group level and are not directed at specific individuals. The effect of an intervention can, of course, be different for each person. A measure may apply to the whole group, but the behaviour of some individuals may change more than others.

6. The reporting about the research data takes place solely at the group level. This also applies to reporting back to the institution where the research took place. Groups can also be subgroups in this case, as long as the data cannot be traced back to individuals.

2.5 Conduct of researchers

1. Researchers do not make false, deceptive or fraudulent statements concerning their 1) academic degrees and titles; 2) number and nature of publications; 3) institutional association affiliations; 4) research findings and 5) working experience, professional achievements, and competences.
2. Researchers do not invent any data, do not leave out relevant data from the research results and do not falsify or manipulate data in the disclosure of the research results.
3. Researchers can show how they have acquired or selected (e.g. for multiple dependent variables) the collected data, which cleanup techniques they have used, and how they analyzed the data.
4. In case researchers discover significant errors in data they have published, they take appropriate measures to restore the errors by means of a correction, withdrawal, erratum, or other appropriate form of publication.
5. In case researchers discover significant misuse or misinterpretations of their work by others, they take reasonable steps to correct or mitigate this misuse or misinterpretation.
6. Researchers do not present substantial portions or elements of another's work or data as being of the result of their own research, even if they quote the other work or data source occasionally.
7. Researchers only take responsibility for the work they have actually performed or to which they have contributed. Only in the case of actual contribution they can be named as the (co-) author of the relevant publication.
8. The first authorship and co-authorship reflect the scientific or professional contributions of the individuals concerned, regardless of their relative status. Bringing in a grant by means of a research proposal can be considered as an important contribution, because a) the main ideas of the research are reflected in the grant application, and b) the funding made the research possible. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as programme / group leader, does not justify authorship. Small contributions to the research or writing publications are appropriately acknowledged, (e.g. in footnotes or in the introduction). The faculty follows the guidelines for authorship as laid down in the following guidelines for academic publishing (NOG OPZOEKEN).
9. A PhD student is usually listed as the first author in every article that is substantially based on the dissertation research of the PhD student, in case the publication occurs within the promotion time or a short time after the promotion.
10. Researchers do not publish any data that has already been published as original data. Data can only be republished in case the researcher explicitly states the non-original nature of the data in the relevant publication.

11. Researchers do not compensate employees of any type of communication media in return for the publication or publicity of their work,
12. Researchers who review material submitted for presentation, publication, grant or research proposal for evaluation, respect the confidentiality and ownership of those who have produced or presented the material to them.

3. Acknowledgements

This document, used by the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEWEB) , is based on: 1) Ethical Review Guidelines of the Faculty of Psychology and Education of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, June 2014 (Dutch: Ethiek Reglement, Faculteit Psychologie en Pedagogiek, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, juni 2014), which is in turn based on psychological research ethics guidelines and directives of Hygienic Working Psychophysiological Research, department of Psychology, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam, March 2003, and 2) the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (2002) with amendments (2010) .

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4. References.

- ALLEA (All European Academies) European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, 2009. [Link to document](#).
- Ethiekreglement, Faculteit Psychologie en Pedagogiek, VU Amsterdam, juni 2014
- Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (2002) with amendments (2010) .
- KNAW (National Board for Research Integrity) Regulations of the National Board for Research Integrity, 2009.

Dutch version: [Link to document](#).

English translation: [Link to document](#).

Note: The English translation of the Regulations of the National Board for Research Integrity is for information purposes only. The Dutch text is binding.

- VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice, 2004, revision 2012. [Link to document](#).
- VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) The Netherlands Code of Conduct for the Use of Personal Details in Scientific Practice, 2005, (in Dutch). [Link to document](#).