

Stewarding the Human Good: Understanding the Nature of Research and Its Ethical Horizons

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Author's Note

This *Prelude* was produced solely from the author's original scholarship and academic collaborations. The materials found in this *Prelude* were also used for the development of a research ethics educational resource used by members of an institution the author serves. The views represented in this *Prelude* do not represent those of the Society of Research Administrators International or any of the institutions the author serves or has served in diverse capacities. The author wishes to dedicate this *Prelude* in thanks to two of his mentors of the past three decades, Dr. Adam McKee and Rev. Dr. Melvin Blanchette.

Introduction

"Science, by itself, provides no panacea for individual, social, or economic ills. . . . But without scientific progress no amount of achievement in other directions can insure our health, prosperity, and security as a nation in the modern world."

---Vannevar Bush,
Science, The Endless Frontier.

Research administration and leadership, above all, directly serve the needs of researchers, scientists, research programs, institutions and their leaders, and the public trust itself. Research administration is therefore an expansive and all encompassing profession. It integrates all of the diverse arts and sciences that are foundational to leadership and service in the management and strategic development of research. Such areas include policy formulation, leadership science, organizational psychology, financial management and oversight, regulatory compliance, and critically needed tactical areas. However, the foundations of research administration also include other areas that are sometimes assumed. Research administrators need to develop an appreciation for and understanding of the actual academic or scholarly areas of the research being conducted. There is a need to understand the art of publication practices and scholarly writing. Communication arts are critical. For international research efforts, it is essential to understand the underpinnings of multiculturalism and the processes of paradigm shifting that occur in global partnerships. For the future advancement of the

research portfolio of the individual program or institution, there is a need to gain some level of the arts and sciences of programmatic development. Of particular importance to our concerns here, there is a need to understand the overwhelming power of ethics as it touches upon nearly every aspect of the act of research and its administration.

Unfortunately, there has developed an understandable but incorrect assumption that ethics is the same as compliance. In some cases, very erroneously, there are some underdeveloped notions that ethics is the same as a type of legalism that is disrespectful of the profound nature of law that is itself an art and a science. Ethics is assuredly not about legalisms. It is not simply about “checking off the box” to fulfill requirements. It is also not just about complying with those requirements. Indeed, it includes compliance, but its definition is not subsumed by compliance. Ethics is far broader. Ethics is the essential context for compliance. Assuredly, they are related. Also related are law and ethics. Yet ethics has a broad and demanding foundation. It is, at its roots, about the formation of character in both individuals and institutions. Ethics is about the ongoing development of a system of values and high principles that inform and guide one’s activities both for individual persons and for the institution as a corporate sole. Ethics is as much about “who” one is, as it is about “what” one does. In this sense, ethics in research is critical especially when one considers appreciably the power of research to touch the lives of individuals and the world in which we live.

As such a phenomenon, ethics in research is a powerful and critically important area of concern for research administrators, executives, managers, and professionals. Research administrators help to steward the development of values and the formation of character in the communities we serve. Often, this occurs silently, but always definitely. Such an understanding helps us to appreciate ever more deeply the nature of “research integrity,” as that term so often appears in research policy. To ensure the integrity of research and of those who conduct research, there is a need for research administrators to develop, support and oversee policies and practices that are always compliant; but, even more deeply, are always aimed at promoting the highest values of personal and institutional research conduct, aspiration, and identity. Yet to understand the dynamic interrelationship between research and ethics, it is critical that research administrators understand the nature of research itself. Sometimes, the definition of research or its variant understandings and complex factors can be lost. Education in the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) can assist greatly in this regard. To achieve successfully the goals of ethics and of regulatory compliance in research, the ongoing RCR education of researchers and research administrators requires an appreciation of the nature of research and its fundamental definition, regardless of the actual disciplines involved or the levels of programmatic research to be explored.

Defining Research

RCR education involves an ever-expanding body of knowledge concerning an even greater expanse of emerging topics and specialties. Both the body of knowledge and the expansive topics will ever increase exponentially over time as new concepts about research and new challenges to research integrity emerge. These factors are not limited to any one particular

branch or discipline of research in any of the sciences, the humanities, or technologies. However, to achieve a mature posture in the face of these expansive realities, researchers, research leaders, and other colleagues must become securely grounded in key fundamentals.

One of these fundamentals is the concept or definition of research itself. How is research defined? What contemporary factors have emerged that affect an individual or institutional understanding of research? What are the constitutive parts of the concept of research? How do all of these questions inform and challenge the personal and professional formation of researchers and research leaders? How can these questions deepen one's commitment to the integrity of research?

One interesting metaphor for research is "Genius Becoming Innovation." In other words, research occurs when the human gifts of intellect, curiosity, and skill coalesce in a type of synergy that fires one's desire to investigate questions, advance explorations, and invent new processes or products for the good of individuals and society in general. This metaphorical understanding certainly has power; however, one must go deeper. It is essential that researchers and research leaders appreciate the critical defining factors about research so that ever-changing societal variables in institutions and cultures do not erode the fundamental purpose of research itself.

In today's environment, it is readily demonstrated and accepted that research has become a powerful enterprise with strong financial visibility in the world market place. From the development of pharmaceutical firms to the powerful place of the ongoing development of social media and information technologies, research is a powerful business presence. This is historically consistent. However, research does not have its origins in business, but in scholarship and the formation of scholars both in the past and continuing today. Of particular interest to this discussion, a fascinating conundrum exists. Many of the governing regulatory documents from United States agencies concerning finance and management actually define research not as a business venture, but as an act of human discovery and intellectual achievement resulting in human and cultural benefit.

Many of the diverse United States federal regulations consistently define various forms of research as being about systematic investigations that are designed or intended to contribute to the advancement of generalizable knowledge. Such documents also address various levels of research and necessary compliance with regulations for sound financial stewardship and accountability to the public trust. However, their adherence to the fundamental definition of research as an intellectual activity is more than noteworthy. This assists our understanding that research is indeed *supported* by appropriations/funds; however, appropriations/funds *do not define it*.

It is also noteworthy that the same regulations do not give evidence of any bias that the term "research" only applies to the physical or social sciences. The definitions used and promoted are applicable to any and all fields in the humanities, the social sciences, the physical sciences, and technology development. This information is challenging to some

forms of popular bias that would think of research or of research methodologies as only being applicable to obvious activities in laboratory or social sciences.

Finally, to understand and appreciate the richly complex definition of research and the performance of actual research activities, it is critically important to remember that, in the contemporary United States scenario, research is often an interagency activity. This interagency phenomenon includes any or all inter-relationships among federal, university, private sector, or international peers. In such a vibrant and many-faceted geography, it is very important that researchers, their leadership, and their institutions maintain a complete longitudinal and latitudinal clarity concerning research understandings, principles, parameters, expectations, and requirements for ethical conduct as well as for regulatory compliance.

Beyond the foundational definition of research, there is a need to explore and reflect upon various characteristics of research that are central to its nature but also invitational to its ongoing development as new societal needs and professional/academic opportunities emerge. For the moment, let us explore what might be termed as four “iQualities.”

The Four “iQualities” of Research

Research as Integral to Human Development

History attests to the critical importance of research. Research in any and all disciplines has been central to human advancement and the progress of peoples. Obviously, its strongest energies come from the human desire for discovery, the quest to better life, and the multiple processes that undergird human achievement. Human healthcare serves as one powerful example where the critical place of research is obvious. Human longevity and betterment are directly related to the vast discoveries made over the centuries in medicine and the healthcare sciences and arts. In societies and cultures the world over, research is central to the protection and happiness of our citizens, it ensures their well-being and the well-being of societies and nations themselves. Discoveries abound in all of the many diverse and disparate disciplines that comprise or contribute to holistic healthcare. In each age, new discoveries in holistic healthcare are leading us ever more deeply to appreciate the systemic nature of what it means to be human. For example, in the current era, research in Wounded Warrior Care is reshaping our concept of the human animal. The total care of our wounded heroes, their families, and the impact this has on local communities is leading us, in an interesting way, to redefine ourselves as the complex and inter-related beings that we are. Such a broad re-imagining moves us powerfully to understand that we as persons are not individuals disconnected from others or the world. Our very nature is inter-relational. Hence, as we learn more about ourselves, we come to appreciate that we are indeed responsible not just for our immediacy but for the wider world. Our sense of responsibility is not just to develop an “ability to respond” to our own needs, but also to be able to respond to the needs of others. This is not new. This is an age-old worldview whose power has sometimes sadly been lost in an overly puerile understanding of utilitarian individualism. Our “connectedness” is what gives rise to human care, to charity, to human goodness, to selflessness and maturity and wisdom. Yet, human nature being what it is,

there is a need in our lives to be challenged to continue to grow beyond the self and reach out to others. Research assists our ethical development of character by reminding us of our connection to others, especially to reach out to them in their needs such as in times calling for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Research as Integrated within Institutional Mission

In some cases, there has been an awareness that some corners within agencies believe that research is or can be extraneous to the core mission of our universities or other institutions. This is clearly not the case. Perhaps this misconception of research as extraneous occurs due to a lack of integration of research within the overall mission and structures of the institution. The creation of silos is a difficulty in general institutional life today. However, regarding research, literature underscores the need to integrate research within an institution's daily life precisely because research is central to the institution's mission. With this in mind, there is a clear appreciation how research is central to scholarship and academic excellence not only for the doctoral student or post-doctoral fellow, but for the seasoned scholar as well. Even casual/informal conversation with graduate students preparing for post-doctoral placements makes clear the importance of research. Many of them gravitate strongly toward centers and systems with strong research programs. They are attracted to these because of their belief that a strongly integrated research atmosphere helps them to, in the popular parlance, "stay on top of their game" as scholars, as authors, and as professionals. Research, therefore, is not a variable easily kept to the side. It requires integration at every level of the institution's mission, its future development, and its daily operations. With this in mind, it is easy to see why literature abounds with standards and best practices for the productive administration and management of research programs precisely within institutional procedures etc.

Research as Interdisciplinary

Science and the arts are increasingly addressing together the holistic nature of human experience and the systemic reality of nature itself. As a consequence, executive leaders and developers have increasingly become more appreciative of the interdisciplinary nature of research. Research is interdisciplinary precisely because human life is predicated upon the experience of interrelationships both within the self and with others. This has a profound impact upon the conduct of research in all of the arts and sciences. Too often in the past, the individual researcher practiced one's scholarship and skills in some form of isolation. In the interests of caricature, one might picture mentally the individual scientist in an individual laboratory conducting individual efforts --- or the individual scholar maintaining a personal library and workspace locked away from interactions with others. With these admittedly exaggerated images in mind, but given recent real fears regarding funding etc, the problem of isolation too often can result in an unfortunate sense of territoriality based upon fear of loss. Yet contemporary currents have called for research to become more interdisciplinary. One such example from the world of healthcare and biomedical research is that of the Clinical Translational Science Award system of the National Institutes of Health. Worldwide research leaders are highlighting the essential nature of

research as interdisciplinary because of the systemic needs of the human person and human society. Of particular importance in the one area of healthcare, as already addressed previously, the needs of wounded warriors are catapulting the interdisciplinary nature of research as central for the development of holistic, systemic, synergistic healthcare for suffering heroes, their families, and their communities. This has enormous global impact. Wounded warrior care is not just for wounded warriors and their families etc. Wounded warrior care is affecting healthcare for all citizens of the world community. The needs of wounded warriors require attention minimally to four general domains that are of importance to all persons: health/wellness, personal formation/spirituality, social relationships/community, and professional development etc. Such needs are not tied to any one specific discipline. The technologies and discoveries required to meet these needs cannot be researched in isolation. This is not true just of healthcare or biomedical research. It is true also of research in the humanities, in the social sciences, in engineering, in knowledge systems and information technologies, and in every aspect of human knowledge and culture. The development of the most effective resources for human development and cultural progress requires intense interdisciplinary dialogue.

Research and Internationalization

One of the results of discovery and innovation has been the increased connectivity among members of society. Especially in the last 150 years with the advancement of communication/information technologies and knowledge systems, human beings have sought to overcome the reality of geographical distance. Such is clear from the efforts of historical research giants such as Nikolas Tesla and Marshall McLuhan. Using the language of McLuhan, the world has become a “global village.” With this concept clearly in evidence, as well as many popular adaptations of the same, research efforts have increasingly been designed, configured, implemented, and brought to benefit among many nations the world over. In fact, even within government direction, the concept of expanding research outward as a public-private partnership for worldwide benefit has been directed for many years. With all of these points in mind, it is clear that research is an international or global reality. In many corporate as well as academic institutions, both public and private, research today is often designed as a partnership among diverse, multinational and multiagency scholars/executives in all disciplines. The international nature of research is designed to create ever greater and ever more expansive world-wide benefits --- and likewise to make research truly an ever-generating activity for untold horizons and emerging human needs over time. One of the challenges for the ongoing internationalization of research is to appreciate the impact that multicultural diversity has upon the communication of goals, strategies and outcomes for research activities. Individual cultures sometimes engage in international relations in a univocal manner without understanding that distinct cultures operate from distinct paradigms. Such distinct paradigms affect the ability to bring research discoveries to effective realities. For all forms of research, the effects of globalization are profoundly enriching and challenging at the same time. They expand yet again and again our understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to be responsible citizens of a world community in which we are, indeed, responsible for one another’s well being. As research and human lifestyles have become increasingly more systemic and holistic, the breadth of

internationalization for research in all areas adds to the depth and potential empowerment of newer and more comprehensive opportunities and needs to discover and affect positively those whose lives and livelihood are impacted by research efforts.

Research: Creating Cultures of Ethical Inquiry

In past decades, various institutions have adopted best business practices and sound entrepreneurial structures for the founding, development, and the implementation of successful research programs, departments, and project management entities. However, it is important that institutional leaders, researchers, research administrators, and related professionals appreciate that these do not capture the fundamental nature of research. As stated previously, business and finance *support* research, however they *do not define it*.

Ultimately, the *fundamentum in re* of research is that it is a culture of inquiry and discovery, of genius becoming innovation. This does not mean that institutions should not emulate, adopt, adapt, and develop the best business and entrepreneurial practices. These are essential for research to reach its proper end; or, as the Greeks term it, its *telos*. In addition, maintaining and developing the finest financial, administrative, and management operations is essential to ensure that the research mission is accountable to the public trust. Yet these are best practiced within the context of research as a cultural phenomenon, a human and humane activity. This is a wonderfully rich challenge to the critically central stewardship and servant leadership of research administrators, executives and managers.

Cultures are amalgams of individuals who have shared systems of language and belief, shared systems of ethics and behavior, and shared ways of interacting with one another both interpersonally and professionally. They are founded upon shared ways of conceiving of reality, namely unarticulated paradigms that create a distinct universe. Cultures are not necessarily confined to geographies or other proximities. Families have their own cultures in the same way as nations. In this respect, research as a phenomenon is a culture. The different disciplines of research also comprise cultures of their own. Research cultures of all disciplines also exist within the broader cultures that are their parent university or contextualizing institution. Hence, to understand research as a culture means developing a perceptive ability to operate within a system of concentric circles of interlocking cultures. In this regard, research administration has a profound mission of service within an institution. One of the key services of research administration is to call the organization to the task of being a *culture of character* and a *culture of ethics and integrity* so as to fulfill its mission of being a culture of inquiry whose efforts advance sound and robust human development. Such a task is neither facile nor will it necessarily be understood or appreciated.

With this in mind, one can appreciate the impact of the 2002 investigations of the National Research Council. In its work, *Integrity in Scientific Research*, the National Research Council clearly articulated that research is a culture in which research integrity and ethics sustain and advance the rhythms and pace of discovery and invention. In fact, it is the appreciation of the cultural nature of research and the role of scientific integrity that are

central to avoiding problems related to research misconduct or any form of non-compliance that erodes the ethical nature of research and its importance for human respect, beneficence, and justice. To advance these benefits, it is essential that all members of a research program or institution reflect carefully on how individuals can understand, protect, and promote in an ongoing manner the culture that is research and the proper ends of research endeavors on behalf of the public trust.

Conclusion

As we know, our profession of research administration catapulted into significance in the United States during World War II. From a certain perspective, we might even look to this calendar year of 2012 as a metaphorical type of 70th anniversary of our existence. Interestingly enough, this metaphorical anniversary occurs within the actual historical 80th remembrance year of the start of the infamous PHS syphilis experiments in Tuskegee, Alabama. The coincidence of these two anniversaries is more than curious. In fact, it is as an invitation to careful and wise reflection. This coincidence of calendars may be an invitation for us to reflect deeply upon the definition of research itself, the definition of the ethical character of research, and the definition of what it means for us to tend the act of inquiry and innovation as research executives, administrators and managers.

Without question, we have a moral and statutory obligation to ensure that our researchers and our institutions meet the expectations of responsible stewardship of research. This is especially true of the finances entrusted to our communities by the public or by private sector sponsors. Our contractual obligations are real and require pristine diligence. With these obligations, there is a responsibility we have to our researchers and our institutions to advance the financial and promotional success of our institutions and our researchers. Yet these responsibilities are part of a larger context that is the overarching framework for all these efforts. It is to this context that we must have an even greater commitment.

As discussed in the preceding pages, the act of research in any and all disciplines is central to the advancement of the human good. In 1945, Vannevar Bush as the first Presidential Science Advisor clearly tied the act of research to this lofty goal. Unfortunately, there are some tendencies or unarticulated biases that might assign the loftiness of this goal to its having no hard reality or actual meaning. Such is not the case. Rather, without honoring and respecting the actual definition of research, its relationship to advancing the human good, and the moral and ethical character of research, other human forces become horrifically visible. If financial gain overcomes the gain of human health and well being, the forces of greed and power and domination can destroy who we are and what we are called to be as human beings in a global community with responsibility for one another. The laudatory goals of research excellence must be ordered toward the good of humankind and never at the expense of any woman, man or child in any culture or society. We saw what happened at Tuskegee. We have recently been reminded of even greater tragedies and horrors in Guatemala. We are certainly aware of the forces that led to the abomination that was the Holocaust. We can never let these happen again.

Articles

To proceed along the path of prevention, we must equally be committed to the promotion of all that is best for the human community. The pathway is complex and requires vigilance. It is a journey. As in all journeys, we travel it step by step. The first step is to be committed always and in every manner to remembering our self-definitions as persons, as scholars, as professionals, as women and men dedicated to the service of others. When I think about this challenge, an old memory comes to mind.

Many years ago, one of my new college professors sent a group of us off on a journey --- to perform a project with academic explorations involved. It was, for our small group of young scholars, an exciting journey and an opportunity for us to stretch new wings. It was the age of civil rights and community service projects. Our enthusiasm could not have been higher. We packed up our materials carefully, champing at the bit to get started. We were ready to launch; and thus we crowded in a hallway waiting to take off. Our professor was to meet us and send us off. He did so with words of enthusiasm and kindness. We thanked him for his well-wishes and turned to head out the door. And it was just then that he turned back slowly with a deep gaze and gave us a final admonition in the style we all recognize today of the recently departed Steve Jobs:

*“Oh, before you take off --- just one more thing. No matter what happens, **always remember who you are and what you are.** Always keep **THAT** before your eyes and in your every action.”*

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