

ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH WITHIN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the deontological aspects of the scientific research performed within the public administration. Thus, starting from the general presentation of the ethical norms of scientific research, we have attempted to identify the ethical requirements regarding the protection of the participants to the research within the public administration. Because scientific research within the public administration may have as subjects persons from vulnerable categories, the role of ethics becomes essential. Subsequently, the most important ethics of the research are integrity, honesty and responsibility of the researcher towards all the participants to the research. As such, researchers are morally responsible both towards their colleagues from the domain, towards the subjects of the research and the people who are supporting them – the public and the representatives elected by the public.

Keywords: *public administration, methodology of the scientific research, ethical principles.*

I. Introduction

The scientific research may be considered a true art, given the fact that it has an original contribution to the elevation of the level of already existing knowledge. When we are talking about scientific research, we automatically think of knowledge. It is like an exciting initiation travel, where we start, urged by curiosity and we move forward from what we know towards what we do not know. We all have the vital instinct of curiosity, because when the unknown confronts us, we are surprised and our curiosity makes us research and reach the most complete understanding of the unknown. This curiosity is the mother of all knowledge. It is the method used by the man in order to obtain the knowledge of what is unknown and it is called research [1].

In the domain of public administration, scientific research has the role to analyze the collective behavior and the logics that makes an organization or public institution work. Any research in the domain of public administration starts with a question mark in front of an administrative difficulty. The researcher acknowledges this issue and is going to

formulate one or more hypothesis. The next step consists in checking the relevance of the hypothesis by facts and eventually, the research process concludes by adopting one of the hypothesis. Along this travel, the researcher must face all the uncertainties generated by the huge theoretical and methodological diversity in the domain they are studying. As such, the research involves two essential items or conditions: the interpretation of the observed world and the interpretation of the texts of the scientific literature, which speak about this world [2].

Along with the upsurge of the scientific research in the domain of public administration, there also came the necessity to regulate certain aspects referring to the research methods and ethical principles. The recent discussions related to the scientific research within the public administration are going back and forth in two directions. The first one refers to the degree in which the research may be integrated in a database of knowledge which may be fact checked, used in order to substantiate the science of public administration. The second direction aims at the methodological aspects, namely the type of issues triggered by the research, analyzing if these issues can be resolved by applying already existing methodologies and if the respective methodologies produce useful knowledge. This direction targets the contribution to knowledge of the research institutions from the public administration.

II. Ethical norms of the scientific research

The scientific research activity consists of investigating certain aspects of the world and then systematically shaping them. The diachronic analysis of the scientific research progress shows that even from the beginning, the scientific community relied upon itself in order to regulate the way in which the research activity must be carried out. In order to protect the integrity of the scientific findings, the researchers designed a set of common principles and practices which represent the basis of the ethical behavior specific to the scientific community, like the principles of originality, individualism, independence, collegiality, honesty, objectivity, and openness. All those principles intertwine with a set of unanimously accepted rules, namely:

- Communalism which refers to the expectation that discoveries will be freely shared and dedicated to the community of scientists.
- Universalism which refers to the expectation that scientists should judge empirical claims according to impersonal criteria without regard to the identity of the author.
- Disinterestedness which refers to the expectation that scientists will subordinate their own biases and interests to the advancement of knowledge.
- Organized skepticism which refers to the expectation that scientists will subject empirical claims to systematic scrutiny and validation [3].

Thanks to these norms which govern the scientific communities, the discoveries generated during the scientific process could contribute to the enrichment of the human knowledge and the resolution of the social issues. But like the behavioral norms of any community, the fact of their existence does not translate into universal compliance (Zuckerman, 1977). Although scientists are expected to disseminate their discoveries through published papers and reports read by the larger community, the research itself is vetted through a process of the peer review of the published work [4].

The ethics of the scientific research states that the researchers should not hide, distort or falsify information, data which appears in the research process. Despite this, it is necessary to distinguish between fraud and common mistakes. Thus, fraud involves a deliberated intention to distort reality, while the mistake appears fortuitously. The researchers who discover mistakes in their research must recognize, correct them and ensure that they have minimal negative consequences. Thus, a responsible researcher must propose some realistic objectives that have a social impact and bring something new on the knowledge side. The researcher must prove the fact that he has enough experience and professional knowledge that allow him to enroll in the research project. At the same time, he must prove that he has financial possibilities and informational means necessary to sustain this project. Thus the most important moral censorship instance of the scientific research activity is represented by the moral-professional conscience of the respective researcher [5].

III. The unethical behavior towards the results of the scientific research

The researchers have the obligation to respect the results of other scientific research and quote them with responsibility, by rejecting the plagiarism. This, both the researchers and the institutions where the research projects take place must reject any shape of scientific fraud, irrespective if this is about falsification, manipulation or selective presentation of the data. In a determined period of time, the researchers must put at other researchers' disposal the data obtained along their own research, for verification. The institution that hosts the research must offer space for data storage, so that they might be recovered even when the researcher ended his work relationship with the institution.

- Researchers and research institutions do not accept scientific fraudulence, either in the form of forgery, manipulation or the selective presentation of data from research conducted by themselves or others.
- Researchers and research institutions do not tolerate plagiarism of research.
- Researchers and research institutions make data accessible to others for verification within a certain period of time.
- Researchers present research done by others in a balanced and honest manner.
- Research institution must have guidelines and routines for storing research data in such a manner that the data may be retrieved, also when the researcher has terminated his or her working relationship at the institution [6].

When publishing the results, the researcher must also describe the methods used in research, and the referents must analyze firstly if the norms of the scientific community were respected. The material shape of the respect a researcher shows towards the scientific community he is a part of consists of the way he chooses to make public the results of his research. Generally, the violation of the ethical norms of research is revealed in the publications and research reports, when a paper may present fabricated methods by describing experiments that were never conducted, observations that were never performed, and calculations that were never made (Zuckerman, 1977). This is referred to as “forging” the data. In some disciplines, peers will not accept the findings without physical proof of the experiment. When hysical evidence is expected, it may also be

fabricated. In addition to forging data, data may also be deliberately manipulated or falsified to support conclusions that are incorrect [7].

The unethical practices may have several shapes, as per the following examples:

- 1.The researcher chooses to make public only the data that is according to his research hypothesis. These defective methods are revealed by the method of study replication, because if the reported results are false, they cannot be reproduced.
- 2.An unethical behavior is also the presentation of a result that does not have an empirical or theoretical foundation. The researcher has the responsibility to deny fraudulent research practices, either under their own name or under other person's name.
- 3.The researcher uses other author's data without specifying the source. This violation of the deontological research norms is known as plagiarism.
- 4.Another situation of this kind appears when a person (a manager) claims a work to which they did not contribute significantly or at all and does not mention the names of the subordinates which were involved, under the author section.
- 5.Another shape of unethical behavior is the one when parallel researches are generated, which aim at undermining another scientific research, in order to devaluate it.
- 6.Another dishonest practice appears when a researcher „steals” other people's ideas and incorporates them in his own research, by taking advantage of the mutual assessment process.
- 7.It is also immoral to deliberately communicate incorrect results or to present positively products which don't have importance or are often dangerous.
- 8.The most serious form of violation of the scientific research ethics is the scientific research activity carried out with purposes that affect the social security. Generally, scientists enjoy the respect of society, which makes it difficult to expose illegal deeds. The public tends to think of them as well intentioned along with the universities with which they are affiliated. The status accorded scientists is related to the role that research and development play in maintaining a healthy economy and improving the human condition. Interestingly, when scientific fraud and deception are exposed, scientists around the world have tended the 'circle the wagons' by minimizing extent of the misconduct or

characterizing the incident as aberrant and isolated fueled by stress, bad judgment, or moral corruption [8].

IV. The violation of the ethical norms towards the participants to the scientific research

The best known shape of the unethical behavior from the history of the scientific research was the one of the medical experiments performed by the Nazis. The horrors committed during the Second World War triggered the necessity for the Nuremberg Code in 1949, which includes ten moral, ethical and legal principles regarding the scientific experiments on human beings. Over the time, the provisions of the Nuremberg Code extended to the social and behavioral sciences.

Over the time, other ethical regulations appeared, such as the Belmont Report (1979) and the Declaration of the Global Medical Association from Helsinki (2000), having a significant impact in the clinical research and not only. The ethical principles which are found in the Belmont Report are:

1. Respect for persons: This principle incorporates the belief that individuals should be treated as having autonomy and that those with diminished autonomy (e.g., minors, prisoners, those mentally incompetent) are entitled to protection.
2. Beneficence: This principle conveys the obligation of researchers to “do good” and that human subjects are to be protected from harm. Researchers are also obliged to maximize the benefits of their research.
3. Justice: This principle ensures that the selection criteria for participation are not based on gender, race, easy availability, manipulability or compromised. Thus the benefits from research should be available not only to the wealthy and privileged, but also to the poor and less advantaged [9].

Within a social research, the consequences of an unethical behavior are not as serious as in the case of a medical experiment, for instance. The harm brought to the participants may be in this case psychological or social. Although physical harm to participants in social research is highly unlikely people can be harmed personally (e.g., by being embarrassed or humiliated), psychologically (e.g., by losing their self-esteem or

by being forced to reveal something about themselves that they would not ordinarily share with others), and socially (e.g., by losing trust in others or suffering a blow to their reputation). Almost any type of research that might be done carries the risk of harming others in some way [10].

The risks to harm the participants to the scientific research cannot always be assessed from the beginning, because the degree of psychological harm is different from one person to the other, depending on each other's sensitivity. In order to minimize the risks, the researchers have the obligation to inform the subjects of the research regarding the predictable or possible risks or the possible discomforts before enrolling in a study. In this way the participants have time to calculate the effects of their involvement in the research project.

In the attempt to avoid the possible psychological harms which may appear, the researchers should examine the participants to the research before moving forward with this. This, if they anticipate that a potential stress or discomfort may appear, the researchers must evaluate the gravity of these aspects. A common method to neutralize the stressing effects consists in informing the participants about the risks. At the same time, the main researcher has the obligation to make available to the subjects several procedures of contact in case of issues or adverse events. Similarly, the researchers must provide a special protection to the vulnerable categories, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women and fetuses, institutionalized persons with mental disabilities, elderly persons and economically or educationally disadvantaged persons.

The relationship researcher – research participant is based on two fundamental principles. On one hand, the participants have the right to choose if they want to be part of the research project or not, without the fear of pressure or coercion. Thus, their consent is a guarantee that the participation to the research is voluntary. The other principle is based on the conviction that the participants have the right to receive relevant and necessary information to decide whether they should be part of the research or not. The participants' right to privacy is an inviolable condition of the research. According to Westin, privacy refers to "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to

others (1968, p. 7). Sieber expands this to include confidentiality and argues that confidentiality “refers to agreements between persons that limit others’ access to private information ”(1982:146). Thus privacy refers to persons and confidentiality refers to information [11].

In spite of these, there were numerous cases when the research participants were cheated with regards to the purpose and terms of the research. In the latest years, along with the appearance of computerized databases, the potential to violate one’s individual privacy spiked, bringing up the necessity to have specific legal regulations.

Conclusions

The ethical responsibility towards the scientific research belongs entirely to the researchers who are conducting it. They are responsible with the results of the research, the way they are utilized and their effects. The responsibility is even bigger taking into consideration that the results of the scientific researches may have a major impact on the human communities. From this reason, any scientific research activity must make place not only in an organized framework, according to the technical needs of the research act but also according to certain norms or strict rules which must be respected entirely [12]. According to Constantin Enăchescu, these rules reflect the report between the researchers and the object of research, the other researchers enrolled in the same research project, as well as the beneficiaries of the research. In the context of the present development of the scientific research methodologies, the researchers are subject to some ethical challenges generated by certain unprecedented professional, social and political pressures. The scientific researcher must justify the research act, the utility and validity of the results he obtained, he must try to bring a benefit to the society through his research. Taking into account these aspects any scientific research must be subject to a moral censorship [13].

The ethical principles and standards have the purpose to resolve the unpredicted and conflict aspects which appear in the research environments, as well as the ethical dilemmas. However, sometimes the informal norms that regulate the behavior of the

researchers are insufficient to maintain the scientific integrity. From this reason, the informal norms were strengthened by implementing juridical regulations.

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