



Leadership Discussion Guide: A Friend's Dilemma

You are a research assistant and your colleague expresses concerns about her collaborator's non-transparent research practices. You decide to help out and look into the data. While you cannot find concrete evidence of fraud, you have the word of the collaborator and your own skepticism as his "interesting" results. When the idea of confronting the researcher is floated your friend is worried that the researcher will leave the project. What do you do?

Decision Making Framework:

- 1) List the issues raised by the 2MC.
- 2) What rules or regulations apply to the situation?
- 3) What questions will help you open up the problem?
- 4) What resources could you use or consult to help you make a decision?
- 5) What are your options and how does each option affect others involved in the situation?
- 6) What would you do after considering all of these and in light of your own values?

Issues

Data Fabrication
Potential problems with data keeping
What do you really know?
Do you have other options for work?
Whistleblowing: should you tell?

Resources

Campus and federal regulations
Research integrity officer on campus
Mentor
Colleagues
Parents
National ethics center website

Rules and Regulations

Federal research integrity regulations
University's regulations

Options

Report the collaborating researcher
Wait and see
Talk to the research integrity officer on your campus
Talk to the visiting researcher in question
Talk to adviser or other trusted mentor



Questions

Had the collaborator done anything wrong? What? With what results?
If the collaborator had stays would you have reported them?
Should you report them even if they left?
How would you handle the situation to ensure the relationship?
If the collaborator were to take the data and publish the results elsewhere what would you do?
What is the best possible outcome to this situation?
What is the source of funding for this project?
Is there any possibility that you could retreat to your Ph.D. lab to regroup?

Takeaway Lessons:

1) Information Gathering

You have an idea of what happened since the data does not seem possible, however, you would need more information before going forward

2) Seeking Resources

You may need advice before you take the next step. Are you on close enough terms with your Ph.D. advisor or any member of your committee to seek confidential advice from one person? Does your campus have an ombudsperson who might be able to provide confidential advice?

3) Asking Questions

Once you have gathered the facts so you have a fuller sense of the situation, One option is to talk with the collaborator based on what you have learned. You should rehearse these questions so you can ask them in a low-key, professional affect, without making charges. Depending on how your fact-finding goes, you may want to have someone else present when you ask these questions. If you believe that reporting the collaborator have notes and evidence backing your claim.

4) Follow the Rules for Having a Dispute Professionally

Before you have your conversation with the visiting faculty member you should read and absorb the rules for having a dispute professionally.

Next Steps:

After you have spent an adequate amount of time trying to understand the situation holistically, Then you will have a decision to make. Keep in mind that you have no power over the other researchers. You can try to confront the researcher in question however if you don't have enough documentation you wont be able to prove your point. You can aid you fellow researcher in the process they take to talk with the researcher or report the researcher. Doing nothing may lead to your fellow and friend getting dismissed due to poor research methods. In the end this is your friends battle but giving them the tools and the support they need when making hard decisions is necessary.

What Really Happened:

The research assistant investigated the matter for their colleague and in the end the researcher in question was furious and left the university.

