



Leadership Discussion Guide: Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding

You are the lab chief and the current PI is creative and enthusiastic about his work. The PI often describes potential experiments by concluding what he expects the results to look like. Your research assistant runs the experiments for him, you find results that corroborate his expectations almost perfectly. One day, the PI comes to you and claims the data is fraudulent. 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

Fire the researcher
Have a conversation with the PI
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 PI or researchers under the PI done anything wrong? What? With what results?

Is the research assistant to blame, the PI or both?

What if the PI was from a country where when a superior predicts a solution it is best to prove them right?

What is the best outcome to the situation?

Should you have a talk with the PI?

How severe should your actions be towards the researcher that fabricated data?

What is the source of funding for this project?

Takeaway Lessons:

1) Information Gathering

You see that there is a great possibility of a researcher fabricating data, however, you would need more information before going forward.

2) Seeking Resources

You may need advice before you take the next step. Seek counsel from your previous mentors to see what they have done.

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 researcher who is providing the data and with the PI. 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.

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:

You have three main options: talk with all parties so this does not happen again, fire the research assistant or the PI, fire both people. Whether you fire a person or not your data is useless. One of the biggest problems that need to be changed is the culture. It appears from the 2MC that the research assistant might have heard the PIs prediction and assumed that it was what he wanted instead of just a guess. The best way to keep this from happening is having a double blind study. If you decide to fire one of the people then you will need to know that everyone has a bit of responsibility for the data fabrication meaning you would need to fire every person involved or there would be grounds for the terminated party to sue.

What Really Happened:

The lab chief fired the research assistant.

