

Ron Iphofen

**Ethics Review and Research
Governance**

ron.iphofen@gmail.com

Main issues and dilemmas:

- Responsibility of researcher at “coalface”.
- Balancing harm and benefit.
- Dynamic ethical decision-taking.
- Divided loyalties – to profession/research subjects/employing organisation/the law.
- Role of professional associations – advocacy, mentorship, training etc.

Definitions (the 'ideal')

- Research Ethics: treating people with respect, dignity and concern for their values and lives when conducting research. (Professional integrity.)
- Research Governance: concerned with quality, standards and accountability. (Institutional integrity.)
- BOTH = 'good' science and 'proper' behaviour

Further key distinctions:

- Research
- Audit
- Evaluation
- Inquiry

Similarities (continuing the 'ideal'):

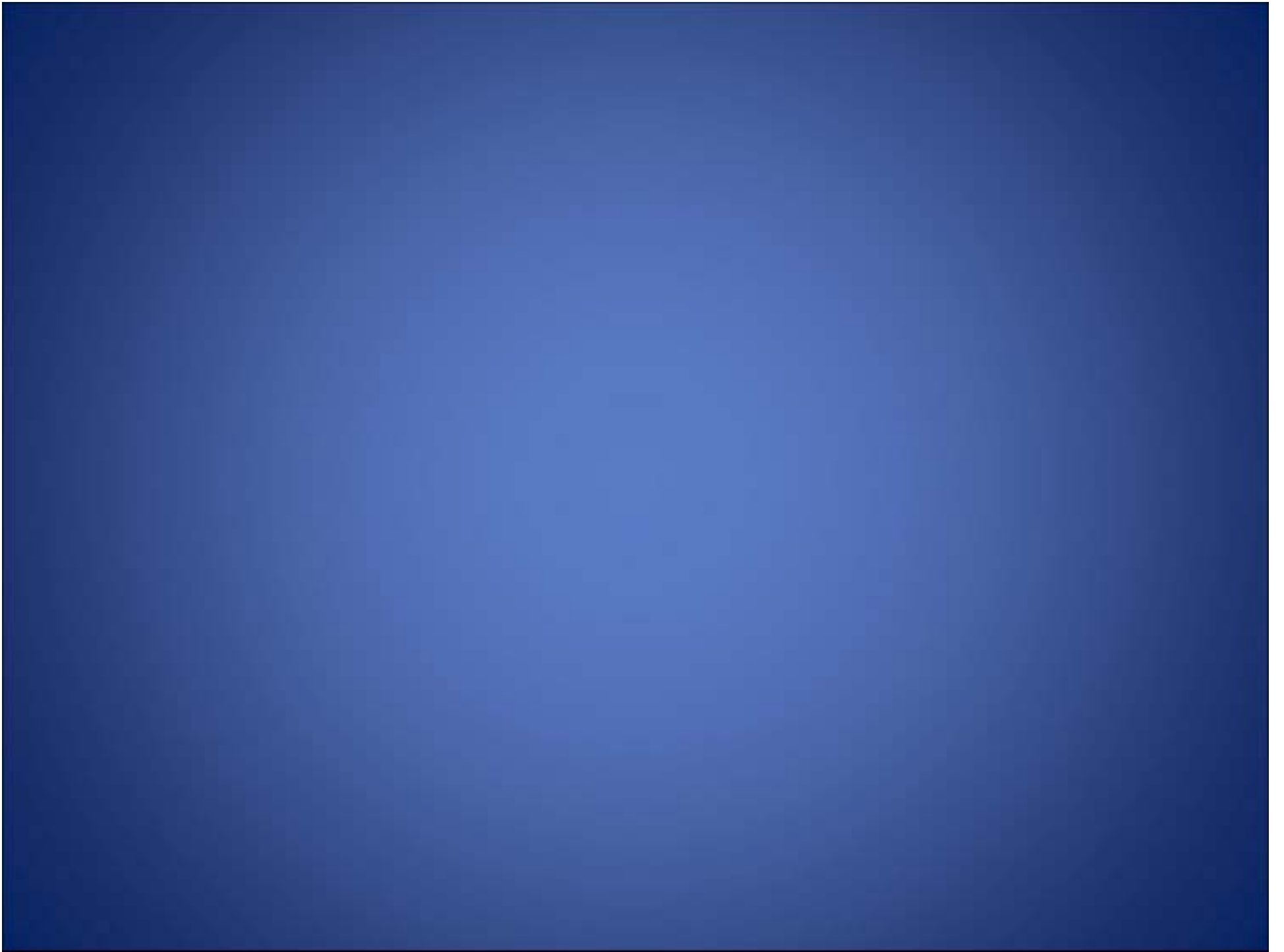
- Methodological rigour
- Professional standards
- 'Quality' products
- Concerned with risk – to all 'stakeholders'
- Balancing harms with benefits
- Facilitative, collegial committee culture
- Supportive of research

Differences (1) – ethics review (ideal?)

- Risk 'alert' – aware but not averse
- Knowledgeable/experienced with both ethics and methodological issues and practices
- Accessible record/collective memory for previous decisions and rationales
- Independence of thought and judgement
- Minimising harms to secure benefits

Differences (2) – governance

- Risk 'averse' – damage limitation
- Knowledgeable/experienced with professional 'standards' in scientific research
- Auditable record of previous decisions and rationales
- Contingency of judgements related to corporate liability
- Avoiding harms to secure benefits



Solutions?

- Recognise researchers' need for independence – or sacrifice the informative value of their work.
- Respect for differences (in ethical and methodological judgement).
- Prioritise risk 'awareness' over 'avoidance'.
- Cultivate (earned) mutual respect between researchers and reviewers.
- Avoid malign discourse.

Principal Challenges (1):

- Change in ethical concern/awareness.
- Comprehensiveness.
- Avoiding duplication of scrutiny procedures.
- Ease of use.
- Covering all stages of research process.
- Consistency across research community.
- Balancing individual and collective responsibility.

Principal Challenges (2):

- Balancing expertise, independence and “lay-ness”.
- Managing complaints/grievances.
- Willingness/ability to share experience of difficult decisions – building a repository of research ethics knowledge.
- Maintaining clear distinctions between research, audit, evaluation, inquiry.

Conclusions:

- Keep ethical review independent of research governance
- Professional associations take responsibility to raise the ethical awareness of researchers
- Researchers maintain their own professional integrity
- Researcher responsibility for ethical practice
- Systems of ethical assurance help maintain trust
- No administrative system foolproof
- Avoid cumbersome systems that obstruct valuable research (facilitative procedure and demeanour)