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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY ADVISERS: DO THEY HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES?

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Abstract

This chapter presents the results of an international survey of "academic ethics officers" (AEOs), mainly integrity officers, ombudsmen and directors of doctoral schools. In view of the diversity of proposals put forward by the respondents, the authors wonder about the possibilities of increasing their self-confidence in a changing world. The object of the research must be defined: trust. A semiotic analysis of the *verbatims* makes it possible to induce a model with five dimensions to which the GDRs feel more or less close, and therefore mobilised in a variable way: identity proximity, network proximity, process proximity, technological proximity and functional proximity. For each of these dimensions, observations are made and proposals are made as to what IRAFPA can or cannot do to reinforce them[*].

1. Introduction

We all know that only a minority of cases of fraud and plagiarism come to light and that nine-tenths of the iceberg remains invisible. But the disturbing question is not how many cases slip through the cracks. There would be no point in putting our skills as observers of the academic world to work revealing these facts. The question, for us as researchers in the field of integrity, is how to help the men and women who have chosen to become 'academic integrity advisers' (AIAs) to fulfill their mission.

What do we mean by academic integrity advisers? There is very little research to define their function and the role they play in the academic community. Bramstedt classifies what she calls 'integrity officers' into three categories—*watchdogs*, *lap dogs,* and *dead dogs*—depending on their degree of involvement in their function.[4] In her view, all integrity officers may suffer if institutional actions seem to fun contrary to their personal ethics. She found that loyal, reliable, and hard-working *watchdogs* may also experience moral distress at being unable to deliver good-quality service to whistleblowers, victims, and academic authorities. Whether they are ombudspersons, *référents intégrité* in French institutions, directors of doctoral schools, chairpersons of disciplinary committees, directors of copyright offices, etc., we find that AIAs do not always feel significantly supported by their institutions when confronted with the consequences of growing and sophisticated delinquency.

When we conduct mediations in France, we are in close contact with the *référents intégrité,* who are people appointed by each university to deal with cases of fraud and plagiarism and to ensure that regulations are applied. Although they are sincerely committed to the defense of ethics

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[4] K. A. Bramstedt, 'Integrity Watchdogs, Lap Dogs, and Dead Dogs', *Accountability in Research*, 28(3) (2020), 191-95.

in the professional field of higher education and scientific research, their discomfort with the difficulty of acting sometimes leads them to disengage or resign from their jobs. For example, when we build up evidence files to help victims assert their rights, we frequently witness their surprise at the denial (and often anger) of their delinquent colleagues or superiors. So, beyond the support of their institution, it is not personal courage that matters. What matters is possessing the key to mobilizing systems and people. That key is the 'confidence' they have in themselves and in their real possibilities for action.

Yet, the academic world is based on trust. Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet,* in the midst of a storm over the retraction of a fraudulent paper in August 2020, wrote: 'We trust what the authors of scientific papers tell us... If they tell us there is a database and they sign a statement saying they are reliable, we trust them, as do the external reviewers we ask to assess their work'.[5] So let's talk about trust. In a world of symbolic violence, is reinstating integrity at the heart of our academic system a pipe dream or a real possibility?

In this chapter, we examine the concept of trust as a driving force in relationships between stakeholders, but also as a cognitive and affective tension that transforms motivation into a willingness to engage in order to strengthen academic ethics.[6] We have explored what the anchors of this trust are in an uncertain universe, characterized by fuzzy information and imperfect regulatory situations and standards. To attempt to formulate an answer, we questioned AIAs with two open-ended surveys and asked witnesses to write about their experiences and

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[5] H. Morin and P. Benkimoun, 'Richard Horton, patron du "Lancet": "Le COVID-19 montre une faillite catastrophique des gouvernements occidentaux"', *Le Monde.fr,* 20 June 2020.

[6] J. B. Smith and D. W. Barclay, 'The Effects of Organizational Differences and Trust on the Effectiveness of Selling Partner Relationships', *Journal of Marketing*, 61(1) (1997), 3-21.

doubts concerning the topics discussed at our last conference in Coimbra, 30–31 October 2020.

2. From the elusive concept of trust to the pragmatic concept of proximity

At IRAFPA, we are wary of vague terms. Vague due to being overused, vague due to hopes that never become reality, vague due to actions rarely carried through to completion. *Trust* is one of those vague terms: Google Scholar shows us more than 700,000 references to *confidence* and more than 3 million references to *trust*. Fortunately, we have learned to handle our languages of expression. For we have three languages in our profession as researchers: our mother tongue for thinking; English (or perhaps *globish*) for publishing; and the implicit. The implicit is to our profession what *saudade* is to the Portuguese. It is the language of our *omertà*. It is 'everyone knew so-and-so was a fraud' when so-and-so ends up being convicted. It is the subtle phrase: 'That guy has no morals', which translates into 'He's an ambitious man who tramples his colleagues to succeed'. Building the IRAFPA corpus entails constantly analyzing this third language to flush out the gray areas of our profession, before validating the concepts that we integrate into our discourse.

In order to work on the concept of 'trust', we proceeded as usual with an interdisciplinary literature review. Most definitions present trust as a belief or as a positive expectation of the partner.[7] But perspectives

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[7] On belief, see J. B. Rotter, 'Generalized Expectancies for Interpersonal Trust', *American Psychologist*, 26(5) (1971), 443-52; P. H. Schurr and J. L. Ozanne, 'Influences on Exchange Processes: Buyers' Preconceptions of a Seller's Trustworthiness and Bargaining Toughness', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11(4) (1985), 939-53. On expectation, see P. M. Doney and J. P. Cannon, 'An Examination of the Nature of Trust in Buyer-Seller Relationships', *Journal of Marketing*, 61(2) (1997), 35-51.

vary according to the aims of specific disciplines. For example, in social psychology and sociology, researchers emphasize that trust is the foundation of any exchange.[8] It is therefore an essential factor for the stability and continuity of the relationship over time.[9] In economics, for authors such as Dasgupta, trust is a construct that originates in a cognitive calculation.[10] Trust is also a conscious, coordinated development.[11] All these definitions of trust situate it as a variable intervening between a deep motivation and an effective behavior. This does not help us conceptualize it.

How can we help academic ethics officers to increase their self-confidence if we do not know how to express the pragmatic dimensions? If we refer to Peirce, we are able to distinguish, for the reference *object*, the signified that this term refers to in our universe from its signifiers, namely the signs that our respondents give us to interpret.[12] The subtlety

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[8] In social psychology, see M. Deutsch, 'Trust and Suspicion', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(4) (1958), 265-79; R. Lewicki and others, 'Trust in Relationships: A Model of Development and Decline', in *Conflict, Cooperation and Justice,* ed. by B. B. Bunker and J. Z. Rubin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), pp. 132-73. In sociology, see J. D. Lewis and A. Weigert, 'Trust as a Social Reality', *Social Forces*, 63(4) (1985), 967-85.

[9] L. Karpik, 'Dispositifs de confiance et engagements crédibles', *Sociologie du travail*, 38(4) (1996), 527-50.

[10] P. Dasgupta, 'Trust and Cooperation among Economic Agents', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 364(1533) (2009), 3301-09.

[11] V. Mangematin, 'La confiance: Un mode de coordination dont l'utilisation dépend de ses conditions de production', in *La confiance: Approches économiques et sociologiques,* ed. by C. Thuderoz, V. Mangematin and D. Harrisson (Montreal: Gaëtan Morin Éditeur, 1999), pp. 31-56; S. L. Jarvenpaa, K. Knoll and D. E. Leidner, 'Is Anybody Out There? Antecedents of Trust in Global Virtual Teams', *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 14(4) (1998), 29-64.

[12] C. S. Peirce, *Écrits sur le signe*, trans. by G. Deledalle (Paris: Éditions le Seuil, 1978).

of inductive qualitative analyses lies in the distinction between the *index* (or clue) that shows the direct connection with the object and the *iconic* remark that denotes the sender's proximity to the designated object. For example, many of our respondents spontaneously replied 'laws and regulations' when asked about their means of action, while others pointed to the peers with whom they discussed their cases. And identifying the *symbol* they used in their answers when telling us about a case or answering an open question requires a detailed knowledge of the culture that we do not always have. For example, in France, anonymous denunciations are still very much associated with collaboration with the enemy during the last world war. Anonymous whistleblowing is therefore not tolerated. On the other hand, *omertà* is widely accepted because it is linked to the privilege of those who are highly placed enough to be 'informed', in a country that remains attached to 'royal' attributes (despite having cut off the head of a king).

So the question is, in a world of fraud and plagiarism far removed from their values, what tools do they feel most able to act with (or upon)?

In their literature review, Knoben and Oerlemans identified the roots of the concept of proximity, which can be: geographical, organizational, cultural, institutional, cognitive, technological, and social.[13] The English-speaking world often seems closer to organizations: inclined to act according to regulations, standardized processes, and formal devices. In other, more Latin, nations, one will look first for interpersonal proximity to discuss academic ethics. We also found that, depending on the culture of the place where they obtained their doctorate, our interlocutors also felt more spontaneously attracted to one or other of these dimensions, and they sometimes found themselves in a state of

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[13] J. Knoben and L. A. G. Oerlemans, 'Proximity and Inter-Organizational Collaboration: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 8(2) (2006), 71-89.

cognitive dissonance with their closest colleagues once they returned to their country of origin. For it is difficult to communicate if the corpora are different, and this misunderstanding can be the source of some symbolic violence. The aim of our research (see box below) is to present the shared dimensions of this trust that all AIAs need in order to be able to communicate and act.

IRAFPA's studies in 2020

We conducted a survey (using open-ended questionnaires) of ombudspersons and people involved in the management of integrity-related conflicts and mediation cases, as well as heads of doctoral schools. Our investigation covered a panel of experts located in Canada, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Portugal, and Romania, in January and February 2020. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of twenty-one questions covering six themes: theme 1: identification of facts; theme 2: institutional guidelines; theme 3: internal and external communication; theme 4: monitoring and control; theme 5: training of faculty and students; theme 6: complaints handling and mediation.

A first general observation is that a response rate of 20% can be considered low, with a panel of people identified as being in a position of responsibility, such as heads of doctoral schools. Some of them pass the buck to other managers: 'There are optional or compulsory integrity courses a few hours long and that seems to them to be enough' or 'I inform the commissioner of offences'. Many simply say that they cannot answer because they do not have enough experience. Others see only the most serious faults without considering that ethics is a daily practice.

Interim reports have been published online on the particular issue of 'university integrity officers' in France and on the issue of doctoral school directors based on the first thirty completed questionnaires.[14]

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[14] M. Bergadaà, 'Analyse préliminaire "Établissements et Intégrité académique"', *Responsable,* 30 March 2020; M. Bergadaà, 'Analyse

Because this is a qualitative analysis, the in-depth examination of thirty detailed responses is sufficient to perform a floating analysis, but not of course to propose a structuring of the field or a social representation of the concept of integrity in institutions, and certainly not a profile by geographical areas.

We therefore completed this initial floating analysis with a semiotic analysis of the responses of thirty heads of doctoral schools, ten members of university rectorates or presidents' offices, and eight administrators in charge of ethics and integrity issues. We also asked twenty-five people with whom we had conducted mediations over the past ten years to react to the themes dealt with during the International Colloquium on Research and Action on Academic Integrity (30-31 October 2020). To enhance the linguistic work on the concept of trust through the dimensions of proximity, we implemented the methodology proposed by Guilhaumou, Charaudeau, and Kerbrat-Orecchioni.[15]

The diagram below illustrates the five main axes of proximity—or dimensions of trust—that we have derived from our analyses. These axes are defined by the explicit 'observables' that were provided to us in response to our questions or spontaneously, as these were always open questions. These observables are the warp and weft of our presentation below. It should be noted that, in qualitative data analysis, we speak of 'data saturation' when we find nothing new in the answers and there is no point in conducting further interviews. After creating Figure 1, we

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préliminaire "Etudes doctorales et Intégrité académique"', *Responsable,* 30 March 2020.

[15] J. Guilhaumou, 'Le corpus en analyse de discours: Perspective historique', *Corpus*, 1 (2002), Article 1; P. Charaudeau, *Langage et discours: Éléments de sémiolinguistique (théorie et pratique)* (Paris: Hachette Classique, 1983); P. Charaudeau, 'Comment le langage se noue à l'action dans un modèle socio-communicationnel du discours. De l'action au pouvoir', *Cahiers de linguistique française*, 26 (2004), 151-75; C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *L'énonciation de la subjectivité dans le langage* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980).

looked up the definitions of *trust* and *confidence*. Simply put, *trust* is a subjective assessment based on interpersonal relationships, which is binding on the partner(s), but which cannot be demanded; we recognize here the two dimensions of identity proximity and network proximity in Figure 1. On the other hand, *confidence* is more factual and objective, emerging from institutional arrangements; in this case, we recognize the two dimensions of process proximity and technological proximity in Figure 1.
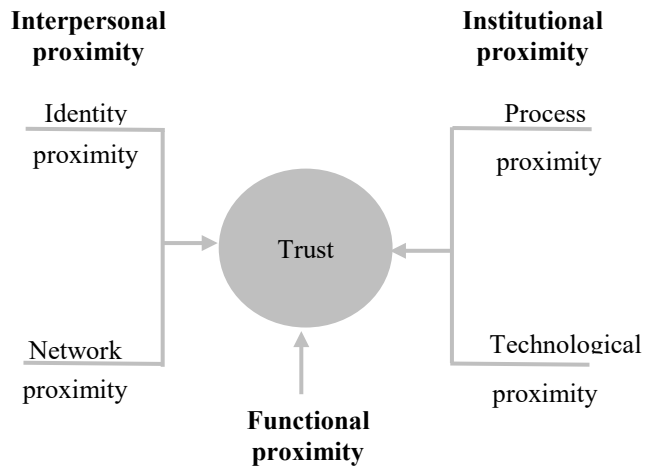
Interpersonal proximity   **Institutional proximity**

Identity proximity   Process proximity

Trust

Network proximity   Technological proximity

Functional proximity

Figure 1: The proximity dimensions of the concept of trust

3. How does interpersonal proximity create trust?

Interpersonal trust is defined as an orientation toward people in general, based on previous experiences, considering that a person or group can be relied upon.[16] This creates operational and social interdependence, which develops a sense of community among the partners. This closeness that the AIAs talk about has two dimensions.

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[16] Rotter, 'Generalized Expectancies'.

3.1 Identity proximity

This identity proximity is ideally considered to be the cement of a community based on the service of knowledge. Victims and witnesses who turn to IRAFPA to request mediation say they are insecure because of the excessive dispersal of cognitive (who is their officer?) and administrative responsibilities in their academic environment (is there an ombudsman? an ethics officer?). They are also disturbed by the distance, in both time and space, between their need for support and the entity that should receive their cry for help. Thus, many of them state that they do not feel close to their institution's ethics officer, even though he is supposed to take care of them, or even distrust the officer, considering that she is primarily at the service of the university president, who in fact appointed her.

It might reassure them to know that our survey results show that many integrity officers are also going through an existential crisis. Many are struck by the fact that our profession seems to have lost its prestige. They tell us that they see the growing importance of conflicts between authors, who call for a mediator on a daily basis. Some fear that this public image will deteriorate further. They are also solicited during conflicts between thesis directors and doctoral students. In the absence of the necessary mechanisms, they do not have a basis for their work and their role is usually limited to finding diplomatic ground for consensus. Many of them also regret not finding a space to discuss these issues with their peers. They feel isolated.

A second observable reported by respondents is the feeling of no longer belonging to a 'shared destiny community' driven by the goal of advancing knowledge.[17] Most respondents who raise this point believe that researchers are not sufficiently aware of ethical issues. These 'watchdogs' (in Bramstedt's sense) thus found it difficult to discuss

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[17] M. Bergadaà, *Academic Plagiarism. Understanding It to Take Responsible Action* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2021), chapter 4.

integrity calmly. The respondents become defensive and the mediation process seems to be a slippery slope. In this context, the mediator is not able to fulfill his essential role as an agent promoting trust between the parties and becomes discouraged.

Another observable of this identity proximity is the growing doubt about the factual inequality between those who fulfill their duty as public servants by serving their institution and the community and those who have a profile as pure researchers. Integrity officers complain that they have more and more responsibilities, while their colleagues who publish only to promote their career are more pampered by their authorities. Some also find it painful to see that many false concepts are disseminated in publications and no one seems to be bothered by this. They put this down to growing individualism and the compulsion to follow mainstream thinking under the diktat of *publish or perish*.

Finally, a fourth observable makes this kind of proximity more difficult to feel: AIAs are caught between recourse powers. Their sense of diminished importance increases as compliance mechanisms gain ground in educational and research institutions. As a result, they are sometimes listened to only after the institutions' legal advisers or the parties' lawyers. A second constraint is that media coverage of cases can undermine mediation arrangements if leaks occur during investigation procedures. Finally, in some countries, legal constraints, such as the statute of limitations or copyright, prevent AIAs from acting.

How can identity proximity be restored and reinforced?

In order to avoid this compartmentalization and allow everyone to exchange ideas and break their isolation, IRAFPA offers colloquia and debates, for example related to this book. For it is not enough for everyone to know that there are experts they can call upon; they also need to understand these experts' reference corpus. For example, a deontologist who relies only on her own convictions about the ethics of belief might not refer to formal rules and standards (if they exist in her

institution). She would miss the arguments of another AIA, who referred to an ethic of responsibility and who based his argument and discourse on managing the consequences of criminal acts.[18] It is through respectful, profound debate that interpersonal proximity is renewed and AIAs' empathic qualities are enhanced.

3.2 Network proximity

We live in a world of networks. Our writings and publications are disseminated within networks based on specific research classified by discipline and by level of difficulty and audience (A Journals, B Journals, conferences, workshops, etc.). Within these networks, the search for the added value of our work is now reflected in citation indexes and funds allocated according to productivity. These networks are essential, and it is therefore not surprising that AIAs feel closer to the members of their networks than to their direct colleagues. This is especially true since the role leads to solitariness due to the confidentiality required for complaints, mediation, and investigation files.

We observe that the structure of these networks can crystallize situations. Some AIAs denounce the recruitment of researchers based on affinity and not on real skills. As a result, they may find themselves caught between clan struggles that they are asked to arbitrate. Their position is all the more uncomfortable as they are well aware of the principle of the staircase: anyone who rises above the others, in the position of ombudsperson, AIA, or head of the doctoral school, will one day have to go back down the stairs and inevitably come across the same people they seen in an awkward position. Logically, some AIAs therefore seek detours to avoid returning to their functions as professors and researchers by the same staircase. They may also choose not to

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[18] M. Bergadaà, *Le Temps: Entre Science et Création* (Caen: Editions EMS—Management & Société, 2020).

return to their former positions and to move from place to place as AIAs.

We observed how common it was for integrity officers, who might be former directors of doctoral schools, to become university vice-presidents or vice-rectors. In this way, network proximity is transformed into bureaucratization conducive, which is to a certain caste-based *omertà*. This leads to an accumulation of functions: people occupy key positions in a logic of power and block the free circulation of information and democratic debate. The risk is no longer just bureaucratization but the crystallization of something that should remain fluid and dynamic: our academic networks. Thus, by analyzing the answers provided by integrity officers in France, all of whom were members of a formal OFIS (office for research integrity) network, we find... that of them simply wait for top-down directives that take forever; meanwhile, they just do their best.[19]

How can network proximity be restored and reinforced?

To counter the discouragement that many AIAs feel as they struggle against both bureaucratization and the crystallization of their supposed networks, IRAFPA has created a WebTV channel that offers AIAs, and everyone else, thematic video shorts, debate programs, online case studies, etc. We also periodically send them the IRAFPA newsletter to enable them to participate in a network that tries to de-dramatize situations by talking very concretely about what they experience every day.

4. How does institutional proximity create trust?

In a situation of uncertainty, individuals hand over part of their decision to commit to an external entity since part of the action is

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[19] https://www.hceres.fr/fr/ofis.

beyond their control and knowledge.[20] Institutional trust is attached to a formal structure that guarantees the effective commitment of stakeholders. In this research, it is based on two well-known dimensions of proximity.

4.1 Process proximity

This kind of proximity refers to not only the tools established in different countries and institutions, but also AIAs' familiarity with them. For example, the University of Montenegro, which set up a comprehensive system with the support of IRAFPA, had to wait for a national law to be enacted before it could define its own scope of action. Sometimes our respondents were aware of the existence of standards and regulations but did not know how or where to find them in the specific cases where they had to intervene.

A first and very noteworthy observation is that, in the English-speaking countries, but also in Quebec and Switzerland, AIAs spontaneously turn first to regulation and compliance mechanisms. It is therefore surprising that formal action is so recent. For example, the French government commissioned the Corvol Report to develop a national guideline, and the Canadian government asked its three national research agencies to develop guidelines outlining 'responsibilities and related policies that apply to researchers, institutions and organizations'.[21] However, while these guidelines are now becoming widely known, this does not mean that AIAs are blindly relying on them. When we ask them to express what they consist of, there is great

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[20] Karpik, 'Dispositifs de confiance'.

[21] P. Corvol, *Bilan et propositions de mise en œuvre de la charte nationale d'intégrité scientifique. Remise du rapport à Thierry Mandon, secrétaire d'État chargé de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche,* 29 June 2016; Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research (Canada) and others, *Tri-Agency Framework, Responsible Conduct of Research* (Ottawa: Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2016).

variance between institutions within the same countries. It seems that each institution sets its own rules and regulations, which are usually intended for students and not for researchers. There are almost as many definitions of 'duty of confidentiality', 'duty of public service', and 'academic freedom' as there are institutions in a given country.

Another observable is the absence or variability of arrangements within the institutions themselves. AIAs do not know how to proceed in defining an investigation committee, for example. For more than fifteen years, IRAFPA has been calling for independent committees in major cases of fraud or plagiarism to avoid conflicts of interest. However, only two of our respondents defined this dimension as deserving attention. Furthermore, some countries are hamstrung by legislation that requires, for example, university presidents to lodge complaints themselves in order to trigger an internal investigation. One can imagine how long the process can take. As for annual reports on fraud and plagiarism, which would make it possible to anticipate and to implement preventive procedures, they are simply nonexistent. Yet we had asked the question for a reason. But even when these assessments exist, only apply to students. In Canada, deans can deal with integrity violations as long as the information is passed on to them. But there is no simple mechanism to protect whistleblowers, nor is there a mechanism for review.

A third observable that bothered our respondents was access to the right experts. In Canada, it seems clear whom cases should be transferred to, depending on the nature of the problem. For example, depending on the case, one should mobilize the head of the Copyright Office or the Office for Responsible Conduct in Research. Other respondents speak not of experts but of influencers. However, the qualification of expertise is problematic if it leads to the role of AIA being entrusted to administrators and not to researchers. For example, a legal adviser does not have the same understanding of the problems as researchers. If we hear 'plagiarism', we spontaneously think of 'work of

the mind' and therefore 'infringement of the inalienable personality', whereas a lawyer will reply with 'prescriptive copyright'.

> **How can process proximity be restored and reinforced?**
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> Regarding process proximity, two articles in this book present the actions of IRAFPA. Ensuring scientific integrity implies the institutionalization of integrity practices by sharing a reference framework with all players. This involves considering the different levels of action to which institutions must respond in the face of possible breaches: guiding principles, involvement of managers, communication, monitoring and control, training, and handling complaints and sanctions.

4.2 Technological proximity

We have gathered little useful information on this dimension. The first observable is the cry of most AIAs for anti-plagiarism software! Except that it is not always accessible and it is far from being a miracle solution. For proof of this, one only has to read the analysis by Eck.[22] A second observable is that it seems strange to be thanked by many colleagues in our survey for the information we provide on the IRAFPA website or its LinkedIn page.[23] The creation of information portals would seem to us to be the responsibility of their institutions. However, the few respondents who indicated that they make use of information platforms seem dubious about them, as they do not seem to be user-oriented. Worse, when they do exist, they are sometimes used to ask AIAs to fill in forms describing their work or the cases they are dealing with, which they find to be a waste of time.

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[22] N. Eck, 'Utiliser des logiciels de détection de plagiat: L'envers du décor?', in *L'urgence de l'intégrité académique*, ed. by M. Bergadaà and P. Peixoto (Caen: Editions EMS, 2021), pp. 321-37.

[23] https://irafpa.org.

> **How can technological proximity be restored and reinforced?**
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> It seems essential to create a specific type of integrity-based modeling covering internet tools. The aim is not to make the integrity website a reflection of the current organization, but rather to create a new type of organization integrating scientific culture and technological proximity. It is a question of analyzing how the use of computers has obliterated methodological debates among researchers and created an illusion of objectivity. Between the black boxes of commercial software and generalist tools unsuited to scientific practices, researchers struggle every day in an increasingly labile digital ecosystem with uncertain governance. On the other hand, the creation of advisory and communication platforms involving multiple players does not seem so difficult when necessity dictates. These platforms, which are flourishing on the web, could serve as information portals but also as places for debate. They could be enriched by contributions from all sides. This does not yet exist at the institutional level.

5. How does functional proximity create trust?

What are the levers of the AIAs' function that would allow them to act quickly when faced with a case of integrity violation? The question may seem pernicious insofar as we observe that a large part of their job description remains to be clarified. Take the example of the integrity referents in France, who for some years were not supposed to deal with individual cases or mediate. Their role seemed to be designed only to implement general regulations and institutional arrangements. In view of the increasing number of complaints, IRAFPA is now working with several of these AIAs to help them deal with problematic cases.

The first observable of functional proximity is the specific skills for which the AIAs are chosen, elected, or appointed. Other than saying that many of them are retired professors, it seems that no distinctive skills are being sought. Thus, French integrity referents are appointed by the

university presidents to whom they report administratively and hierarchically. Sometimes 'watchdogs' have volunteered because they have been powerless witnesses to fraud or have been involved in a commission of inquiry and wish to make their thoughts available to the community. But it all seems to be very subjective and the vast majority of our respondents were unable to say what their profile was.

The second observable is clearly the almost universal lack of training for AIAs. While they may have attended a seminar on integrity in general (e.g. those offered by the CNRS in France), they did not seem to have received any specific training in handling misconduct cases. Most of them proceeded by basic analogy with the few cases where they had been personally involved. The simple techniques of mediation or of building a case seem unknown to the vast majority of AIAs. And if they talk about the need for training (i.e. in ethics), it is to target young lecturers or PhD students, never themselves. None of them distinguished between the concepts of morality, deontology, ethics, and responsibility, which are rooted in very different epistemological and pragmatic realities. None of them alluded to the differences between copyright and slander and defamation.... They had simply not acquired the specialized vocabulary of the position they held.

A third observable is associated with a certain annoyance on their part: the fact that they have little information at their disposal deprives them of any chance to engage in a performative act by speaking out.[24] Thus, some complain that they do not inspire enough confidence to be able to act. For example, many heads of doctoral schools only become involved in conflict situations once they have degenerated. Since at that point they can no longer act as mediators, all they can do is change a student's thesis supervisor. Another example is that it is often only when a thesis is about to be defended in front of a "packed jury" that they are informed of its failings and then it is too late. In order to be able to play

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[24] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

a fully responsible role, they would like to be informed in real time of problematic situations that arise in institutions or entities. Even more problematic is the fact that they often only learn about the most serious integrity violations when these are revealed by the media. This makes them question the attributes of their function.

How can functional proximity be restored and reinforced?

It is up to AIAs' institutions to define the scope of their intervention and their terms of reference. It should be remembered that, symbolically (in Peirce's sense), not being informed of major cases means not being someone who deserves consideration in a hierarchical academic order. Putting integrity back where it belongs—at the heart of the academic system—would therefore call for an unambiguous definition of the function of AIAs. Moreover, when they are involved in mediation with IRAFPA, institutional watchdogs recognize the rigor of our methods and procedures for establishing files. They need only attend our seminars to acquire these skills.

We are aware that they need to be trained as quickly as possible and as slowly as necessary in the tools we have developed and refined over the course of more than 300 mediation interventions at IRAFPA. This is why summer schools are offered with a clearly defined program to fill these gaps.

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6. Discussion

The studies we conducted during the year 2020 allowed us to propose the operational dimensions of the concept of trust as experienced by the AIAs who participated in our work. Institutional frameworks vary considerably from one country to another and from one academic tradition to another. Not only are legislation and regulation sometimes unclear to our respondents but the importance attached to them may be as well. The dimensions of trust thus translate

into proximities with variable geometry that do not only or necessarily imply cultural or purely geographical proximity. If institutional proximity facilitates collective learning, institutional distance is no less intriguing in the space of reflection that we wish to nurture. As a *final interpretant* (in Peirce's sense), our aim is to propose a generic model to foster the self-confidence of AIAs.

IRAFPA has a role to play in the development of interpersonal proximity among AIAs, whether in its identity or its network dimension. Identifying and bringing together agents who belong to the same space of academic integrity also involves fostering 'temporary geographical proximity' in order to build organizational and institutional proximity.[25] The colloquium we organized in 2020 in Coimbra, as well as the Summer Schools organized in 2021, encourage us to follow this path. Sharing knowledge builds mutual trust and self-confidence, as well as a sense of community of action in defense of academic integrity. Beyond the differences between countries with different cultures and traditions, and even between scientific fields, it is possible and desirable to promote a cognitive proximity that allows for the development of shared modes of perception and action among stakeholders in the field of the ethics of research and teaching.

But the institutional worlds observed in our studies communicate only superficially, and may not even understand each other. Who could be surprised that there is no single standard definition of plagiarism, for example, but a multitude? It is time to engage in the democratic exercise of debating the arrangements that exist in different institutions, and to discuss their strengths and weaknesses transparently and honestly. Why do AIAs have to talk to us only bilaterally (and confidentially)? In fact, the democratic construction of integrity should be based on debates

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[25] C. Werker and W. Ooms, 'Substituting Face-to-Face Contacts in Academics' Collaborations: Modern Communication Tools, Proximity, and Brokerage', *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(7) (2020), 1431-47.

involving all AIAs but also all knowledge stakeholders: researchers, supervisors, administrators, and students. There would then be a reconciliation between the *raison d'être* of the profession and its shared values. Peković, Janinović and Vučković explain very well how a holistic approach is possible in an institution where the rector and the heads of faculties were highly motivated to work with some basic coaching from IRAFPA. Process proximity, as well as technological proximity, was strengthened, day after day.

However, there is one point on which IRAFPA cannot replace the real leaders of academic integrity, namely the presidents and rectors of our universities. It is a question of defining a function, with a set of specifications and working resources. It is also a question of giving freedom to act, and freedom also means full transparency of what happens in an institution. The frequent resignations that occur do not seem to be the fault of individuals, but of the lack of consideration for them. It is to them that this article is addressed, because we believe that IRAFPA's role is to help them strengthen the five dimensions of trust that we have proposed. The closer they come to them, the better they will know how to use them. It is the flexibility to mobilize one or another, or several simultaneously, that will strengthen their confidence in their power to act.

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