



**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE ASSOCIATION  
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

CONNECTING RECs IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

**REASA**

# RESEARCH ETHICS GOVERNANCE

**1<sup>st</sup> REASA workshop, 23 May 2018**

**SPIER**

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**Chair: REASA**

# INTRODUCTION

- Regulation of Research Ethics worldwide is not only a contentious issue in Higher Education (HE), it is also a resource-intensive & marginalised governance system
- Aligned governance structures across an institution often compromised
- Discontent by established scholars:
  - “this mess” (Dingwall 2013:3)
  - “the vice of overdoing morality” (Hammersley and Traiaou (2011:379)
  - “moral panic” (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich 2014:88).

# INTRODUCTION

- For the purpose of this session, it seems fair to assume that research ethics governance in HE is unavoidable and growing in complexity.
- The need for 'ethical' and 'effective leadership' is becoming key to drive the research ethics agenda.

# INTRODUCTION

- Emerged as a system to protect the wellbeing of human research participants as a response to human dignity violations in biomedical, and later, in behavioural research as far back as the early 1900s
- System of self-governance in scientific communities guided by commonly accepted ethical principles

# INTRODUCTION

- Development of a formalised research ethics governance system:
  - Nuremburg code (1948)
  - The declaration of Helsinki (1963)
  - The Belmont report (1979),
- Adoption of national regulation and legislation (NHA, 2003; NHREC – 2006)
- Broader public trend towards shared individual and institutional accountability
- Dwindling public trust in the integrity of science, and increased risk adversity of public institutions (Israel 2015:45).

# INTRODUCTION

‘Research ethics’:

*A concern about and regulation of research involving human participants across disciplinary boundaries by means of a system of research ethics governance (Hammersley 2009:212–213; Dingwall 2012:3; Feeley 2007:764)*

# INTRODUCTION

- Public HEI as context:
  - statutory authority of government
  - consumers of state resources (Bótas & Huisman 2012:370)
  - viewed as “corporate actors” (Bótas & Huisman 2012:371)
  - responded globally to this call by the adoption of the underlying principles and practices of corporate governance, thus recognising a need for “governing as well as managing” (Tricker in Rhodes 1996:654)

# INTRODUCTION

- Research ethics governance (Peckman in Amdur & Bankert, 2006:17) :
  - the harmonisation of the interests of research participants, researchers, and society
  - to ensure trust and adequate research participant protection is a recognised theme in academic discourse pertaining

# INTRODUCTION

- Concept 'governance'
  - Latin 'gubernare' meaning to rule or to steer, thus being the person at the 'helm' (Tricker, 1984 in Maassen, 2002:12).
  - Corporate world: "direction-setting and policy-making function of a board of directors (Council) of a company in order to take responsibility for that entity in contrast with the operational management responsibilities of employees in management positions" (Pauw & Louw 2014: 14).

# INTRODUCTION

- Corporate 'governance'

“... exercise of ethical and effective leadership by the governing body towards the achievement of the following governance outcomes:

- Ethical culture (the way we do things when no one is watching)
- Good performance
- Effective control
- Legitimacy”

# INTRODUCTION

- “Corporate” = organisations that are incorporated to form legal entities ... companies, associations, trust, legislated entities ...
- Governing body
- Delegation to committees to promote independent judgement, to assist with power and balance and effective discharge of duties
- Promote effective collaboration among committees with minimal overlap and fragmentation of duties, as well as a balanced distribution of power (King IV, IODSA 2016, p. 29)

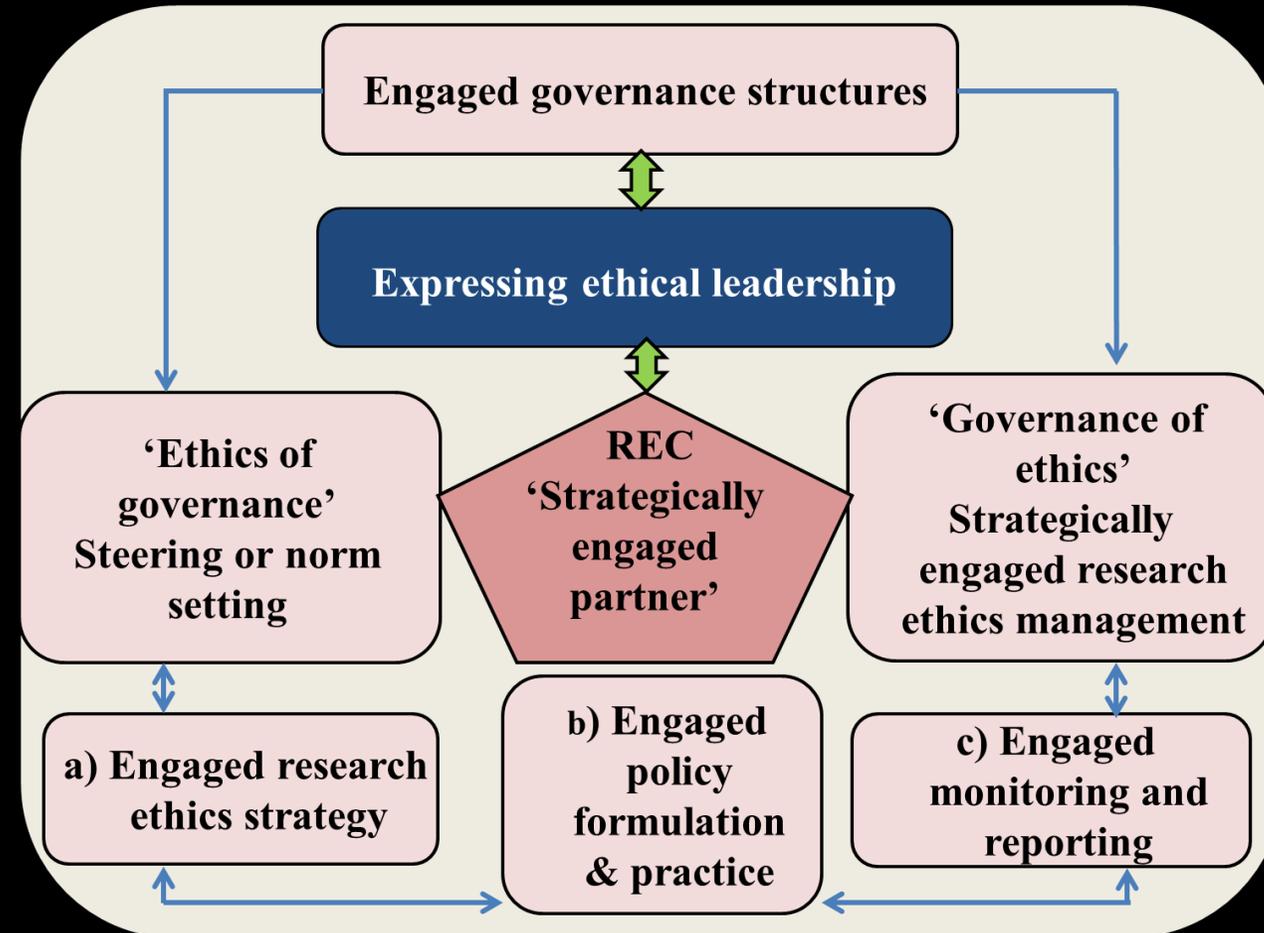
# INTRODUCTION

- Klijn, et al. 2011: 'governance' have two key attributes that transcend different contexts and applications:
  - *a process of decision-making and an implicit moral consideration to balance the interests of multiple actors, and*
  - *a process of management*
- Rhodes (1996:664): governance consists of a process of “steering” or setting norms versus “directedness” or managing the outcome of the process.
- Concept ‘governance’ in research ethics review includes not only the policies, procedures and systems for institutional research ethics review, but also the operations (process of management) involved.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1) If your organisation practices 'good ethics governance' and leadership, how would it be visible to internal and external stakeholders?
- 2) How can ethical leadership by members of the research ethics governance structures within Higher Education, play a role in the resolving the seemingly unavoidable and growing discontent of scholars against the research ethics governance system in HEI?

# A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Adapted from Rossouw & van Vuuren, 2013. Business Ethics. Cape Town: Oxford Press.

# CENTRAL ARGUMENT

- Critique against the legitimacy of RECs in scholarly discourse is symptomatic of a disjointed HE research ethics governance system;
- a system that demonstrates insufficient *strategic engagement* relevant to two interrelated governance dimensions:
- the ethics of governance and the governance of ethics.



# ENGAGED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Governance structures are key to ensure  
effective research ethics governance

# ENGAGED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

- Governance structures are key to ensure effective research ethics governance
  - Council – needs to ensure that ethics are integrated into the strategy and culture

The commitment to ethics should be reflected in the vision, mission and strategic objectives

Commences with an ethics risk analysis

Is there a strategy in place? Reactive, compliance, integrity-based and/or totally aligned (congruence between purpose, vision and ethical values)

Rossouw & van Vuuren, 2013. Business Ethics. Cape Town: Oxford Press.

  - Senate
  - Ethics committee structure
  - Research ethics/integrity office
  - Key committees needed to ensure congruence and to achieve ethics objectives

# CODE OF ETHICS

- First King Report highlights the importance of having a 'code of ethics'
- Code of ethics – agreement that sets the standard for ethically acceptable behavior that needs to be respected by all stakeholders
- Shift from hierarchical organizational structure to flatter structure, thus increased need for:
  - co-operation
  - shared responsibility
  - effective strategic alliance
  - shared values critical (contemporary management theories) to enhance self-discipline and personal responsibility

# REC – STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- Involved in –
  - steering or norm setting dimension, and
  - strategically engaged research ethics management dimension
- Ethical leadership to –
  - balance the interests of multiple stakeholders (and by implication the discontent amongst different stakeholders with the governance of research ethics)
  - To achieve the policy and operational aims with regard to the 'ethics of governance' of 'governance of ethics'

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- RECs are expected to demonstrate ethical leadership within the institutional framework for research ethics governance
- A crucial question: Can it be taken for granted that ethical leadership is indeed the solution as presented in the conceptual framework?
- “The Limits of Leadership” by Sobis, Van den Berg and De Vries (2012) provides an overview of three traditions of leadership theories:
  - the inevitability of leadership
  - the characteristics of leaders and
  - the indispensability of leadership for bringing about changes

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

Sobis, Van den Berg and De Vries: leadership, and specifically ethical leadership,

- is not the attribute of a specific person or position, but
- a “complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligations, commitments, emotions and a shared vision of ‘good’” (Sobis, van den Berg and De Vries 2012:145) with
- ethics at the heart of all human relationships (Hällstén and Tengblad 2006: 224; Sobis, van den Berg and De Vries 2012:145).

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- Key attribute to this notion of 'ethics', is the concept 'care'
- Stiegler (2010:113): human involvement with the unknown and the future as "understanding and care".
- Caring within the context of the governance of ethics in HEIs is thus
  - "a spirited, cultural (human), and communal process of being a professional scholar" (Wessels 2015a:19)
  - by not only caring for the 'what' and the 'why' (the steering and the norm setting),
  - but especially for the how (the managing of the process)
  - resulting in "meaningful discretionary decisions that align the complex macro policy and regulatory framework with the local and sometimes individual needs and circumstances" (Wessels 2015b:557)

# *THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER*

- The success of organizational change, and by implication change such as introducing and sustaining a framework for research ethics governance within an HEI, may
  - “well be more dependent on the presence and characteristics of experienced organizational members,
  - their involvement in the change process, and
  - the congruence between the content of organizational change and the opinions of these organizational members than on leadership by either managers or politicians” (Sobis, Van den Berg and De Vries 2012:149).

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- Sobis, Van den Berg and De Vries (2012:149) thus provide support for the conceptual framework which -
  - does not ascribe ethical leadership and strategic engagement just to managers within the institution,
  - but to an interrelationship of role-players
  - with members of institutional RERCs, being (caring) scholars and not necessarily managers, at the core.
- Organizational change with regard to the processes of governance of ethics and the ethics of governance within HEIs, seems to depend on
  - the caring nature of the ethical leadership
  - provided by the members of RERCs.

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- The ethical leadership role of RERCs is determined by their strategically engagement as scholars –
  - with the process of steering and norm setting to ensure ethics of governance, as well as
  - with the process of research ethics management to ensure the governance of ethics
- Their leadership role is thus expressed as a process of integrating –
  - the steering and norm setting dimension with
  - the strategically engaged management of the research ethics operations, referred to in the conceptual framework and this paper as the 'management dimension'

# THE REC AS A STRATEGICALLY ENGAGED PARTNER

- The primary aim of the steering dimension is thus to *care-fully* explicate the
  - ethical values,
  - principles and
  - moral obligations underlying the governance regime
- The primary aim of the management dimension to *care-fully* operationalise these values, principles and obligations through a constant engagement with –
  - the strategy,
  - policy,
  - practice,
  - monitoring and
  - reporting of research ethics.

# CONCLUSION

- Research ethics governance in HE has shown to be unavoidable, growing in complexity, and worldwide a contentious issue
- How can ethical leadership by members of the research ethics governance structures within Higher Education, play a role in the resolving the seemingly unavoidable and growing discontent of scholars against the research ethics governance system in HEI?

# CONCLUSION

The seemingly unavoidable and growing discontent of scholars against the research ethics governance system in HEI can be resolved by **caring ethical leadership** expressed by scholars who constitute institutional RERCs within research ethics governance systems through engaged governance structures consisting of –

- a steering or norm setting dimension, and
- a strategically engaged research ethics management dimension

# CONCLUSION

The ethical leadership role of RERCs can thus resolve this growing discontent by –

- care-fully balancing the interests of multiple stakeholders (and by implication the discontent amongst scholars with the governance of research ethics)
- in order to achieve the institutional policy and operational aims with regard to the governance of ethics and the ethics of governance

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- The presentation is based on an unpublished paper:

**The Research Ethics Committee as a Strategically Engaged Partner: A Conceptual Governance Framework**

Retha G Visagie

Keymanthri Moodley

- Paper presented – 15<sup>th</sup> International Winelands Conference, 31 March 2016

**Research Ethics Governance in Higher Education: A quest for ethical leadership**

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Kobus Wessels

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