

1. Title of the Project

Regaining Trust: Traversing the Humanities and Social Sciences

2. Coordinators

Dr. Gerwin van der Laan (University College Tilburg)
Dr. David J.M.S. Janssens (Department of Philosophy)

3. Project Summary

Motivation

The legitimacy of research in the humanities and social sciences is under pressure. According to sociologist Gordon Gauchat, trust in the scientific community has decreased between 1974 and 2010 (Gawande, 2016). Indeed, an Ipsos (2016) poll reveals that 80 percent of the UK population trusts scientists to generally speak the truth, a percentage that is equidistant from nurses (93 percent) and hairdressers (68 percent). Regarding a specific case (Brexit), the polled Britons trust their family's and friends' views above those of academics. Apparently, trust in experts – including academics – is declining.

This trend affects the scholars engaged in academic research. Bothello and Roulet (2019) diagnose junior academics with an imposter syndrome: “a condition where high-achieving individuals either ascribe their accomplishments to luck and contingency rather than individual skill and merit, or find their profession to [...] provide little social value.” (Bothello and Roulet, 2019: 854). Junior researchers in a tunnel towards tenure, focus on theorizing and publication games, and risk to lose the idealistic drive that got them excited about an academic career (Elangovan and Hoffman, 2019).

Unfortunately, a scholar's tendency to emphasize the claims of science are ineffective. Sacred beliefs are not effectively debunked by the distrusted academic community (Gawande, 2016). Instead, academics are suggested to realize that impactful research engages with the public and political discourse (Hoffman, 2016), and that involvement in the field is a requirement (Lubchenko, 2017). Moreover, they have been challenged to look beyond statistical significance (Amrhein et al., 2019), to share their research failures (Sousa and Clark, 2019), and to work on methodological shortcomings (e.g. Marcus and Oransky, 2012; Marmot, 2017).

Research question

We propose to bring together the views of academics across the humanities and social sciences on topics relevant to the legitimacy crisis in these domains. It is our intention to make differences and similarities across research fields accessible. In line with the above description of recent work, legitimacy and trust will spiral upwards by emphasizing the claims of science, but rather by demonstrating the honest choices researchers make.

Methods

The research project makes use of data collected in an ongoing interview series. Originally, these video-interviews were recorded to inform University College students about the differences and similarities across different research traditions. In the process of recording these interviews, the wider value of the systematically collected interview data was discovered; hence, this proposal.

In the interviews, researchers from across Tilburg University engage in a conversation with one of the proponents to address the following research questions:

1. What is the role of the researcher? For example, is (s)he an observer or a participant?
2. What is the purpose of the research? For example, description, explanation, prescription?
3. What is the relevance of practice for the field? Do findings need to be readily applied?
4. What are the approaches to data collection? Is there a dominant method?
5. At what level of analysis do researchers in the field seek to contribute?
6. What kind of variables are used?
7. What kind of analytic methods are used? For example, statistics, qualitative interpretation?
8. Where are the boundaries of science in the field? What is considered scientific and what is considered unscientific?

Currently, twelve interviews have been recorded on video. Another twelve interviews have been scheduled and additional invitations are extended. Table 1 lists the confirmed participants.

Since the data was originally processed for educational purposes, the source material needs to be revisited and coded to address the above eight research questions. Interviews last 30-45 minutes, and there is therefore a wealth of more than fifteen hours of video material to be analyzed. To more fully capture the breadth of research in these fields, areas in which Tilburg University specializes less will also be included (e.g., languages, history, international relations, clinical psychology, macro-economics).

TABLE 1: Participating Researchers

Participant	Field
Completed	
1 Prof.dr. Bert Meijboom	Operations Management
2 Dr. Marloes van Noorloos	Criminal Law
3 Dr. Jeroen Stekelenburg	Cognitive Neuroscience
4 Dr. Mark Brandt	Social Psychology
5 Dr. Marc van de Wardt	Public Governance
6 Dr. Theo Klimstra	Developmental Psychology
7 Prof.dr. Jelte Wicherts	Methods and Statistics
8 Dr. Ruud Welten	Philosophy
9 Dr. Jeroen Kuilman	Entrepreneurship
10 Dr. Jurgen Goossens	Constitutional and Administrative Law
11 Dr. Federica Angelini	Organization Studies
12 Dr. Piia Varis	Culture Studies
Scheduled	
13 Prof.dr. Jenny Slatman	Medical Humanities
14 Prof.dr. Christoph van der Elst	Business Law
15 Dr. Tony Evans	Social Psychology
16 Dr. Fabio Braggion	Finance
17 Prof.dr. Wim Drees	Philosophy and Religion
18 Prof.dr. Alkeline van Lenning	Gender Studies
19 Dr. Afra Alishahi	Cognitive Modelling
20 Prof.dr. Gijs van de Kuilen	Behavioral Economics
21 Prof.dr. Odile Heijnders	Culture Studies
22 Prof.dr. Marnik Dekimpe	Marketing
23 Dr. Tim Reeskens	Sociology
24 Dr. Joris Wagenaar	Operations Research

Collaborative aspect

The collaborative aspect of the project is immediately apparent from Table 1: each participant has been selected as a key informant on a distinctive social sciences or humanities research tradition. What is more, however, in interpreting the interviews, the social science perspective of the first project coordinator (who is an economist) is matched by the humanities perspective of the second project coordinator (a philosopher). The collaborative nature of the data prevents that disciplinary heuristics produce biased findings towards one of the disciplines.

Objective

The trainees will closely collaborate with the project coordinators in all stages of the research process. Close collaboration maximizes the realization of their learning potential. The coding of interview data will train their skills in qualitative research methods. Having coded the interviews, the trainees participate in the additional interviews conducted throughout the Netherlands to include views on research not represented widely at Tilburg University. The trainee, finally, participates in writing a book on the findings of the research project.

4. Project timeline

TABLE 2: Timeline

May – June '19	Complete interviews
September – December '19	Recruit and train trainee <u>Milestone:</u> Coding scheme
	Literature study on research eight RQs Coding of interviews <u>Milestones:</u> literature review and 24-30 coded interviews
October – December '19	Invite additional (non-Tilburg University) interviews and conduct these interviews (audio-taped) <u>Milestone:</u> approximately 10 additional interviews
January '20	Coding of audio-taped interviews <u>Milestone:</u> approximately 10 additional coded interviews
February – March '20	Analysis of interview codes <u>Milestone:</u> data display
April – June '20	Write monograph <u>Milestone:</u> draft monograph

5. Research Trainee Profile

Both trainees will be involved in the literature review, the coding of the interviews, the collection of new interview data, the analysis of the findings and the writing of the monograph. We are looking for two Bachelor or Master students at TSHD who are passionate about studying research methods. The trainees are required to have experience in multiple academic fields, or at least have a well-developed interest in interdisciplinarity.

Interested candidates should provide a motivation letter and vitae, with reference to expertise relevant for the project. Applications should be sent to both dr. Gerwin van der Laan (g.vdrlaan@uvt.nl) and dr. David Janssens (d.janssens@uvt.nl).

References

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