



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Nixing a Good Apple?

Author(s)

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Description

A number of the ideas and questions in this case are based on those presented in Teaching the Responsible Conduct of Research Through Case Study Approach: A Handbook for Instructors, Stanley G. Korenman and Allan C. Shipp, Eds., 1994. This case has been adapted from an academic environment to a national government owned, government operated (GOGO) Laboratory setting, and it highlights authorship considerations in this environment.

Body

Dr. Mitch Woodjade joined the National Environmental Systems Laboratory (NESL) as a post-doc. His mentor was Dr. Val Daniels, a widely published and respected senior scientist. During his stay in Daniels' lab, Woodjade hoped to learn certain techniques of systems ecology that he would employ in his own research. To allow Woodjade to do this, Daniels assigned him a leading role in a new project that the lab was undertaking. This entailed many meetings of an eclectic group of NESL researchers, as well as several from the well-funded National Institute of Xenobiotics (NIX), which shares a campus with NESL. After ten months, the data collection and analysis were completed. In the meantime, Dr. Woodjade had accepted an appointment at the University of Alaska, with only infrequent telephone contact with Daniels and her

previous NESL and NIX colleagues. Ultimately, many drafts of the paper were prepared.

Daniels was the corresponding and last author on the version of the manuscript that was cleared and submitted to the *Journal of Systems Discoveries*. Woodjade received the cleared, final version from Daniels. On this version, several new names were added to the four originally suggested by Woodjade, including the director and deputy director of NIX and two others who had submitted data, but otherwise were not involved in the analysis. Woodjade had never worked with three of the new authors on any technical aspect of the project.

Woodjade called Daniels and questioned the additions. Daniels stated that, due to prior collaborations, it was a longstanding policy to err on the side of inclusion on all publications coming out of NIX. NESL's policy is that an author must provide a "substantial contribution" to the paper. Woodjade complained that he did not feel that the two managers and some of the other authors were qualified on this particular paper since they had not made a substantial contribution to the work being published. Daniels replied that Woodjade had no standing on this decision since policy of NIX was time-tested. Woodjade maintained his position against the additional authors and told Daniels that if the names were not removed, then, as first author, Woodjade would not allow the paper to be submitted. Daniels responded, "Well, you can withdraw your name, but the work was done here in our laboratory and we plan to submit the manuscript for publication, with or without you."

Questions:

1. What do you think of the reciprocal agreement between NESL and NIX? Were Woodjade's concerns worthy and legitimate? Why?
2. Woodjade now held a faculty position at a different institution from Daniel's lab. Under these circumstances it may have been relatively easy for him to voice his concerns to Daniels. What difficulties might a post-doc in NESL or NIX have in handling this situation? How might those difficulties be overcome?
3. The results of this project are significant and provide a novel insight into the field that could prove beneficial to many investigators in the area. Therefore, should Woodjade compromise with Daniels so that the paper can be promptly published? Does authorship trump publication; that is, is proper attribution more important than getting out the vital information? Is protecting the

environment a more important value than scientific integrity? Can these be separated?

4. What do you think of Daniels' rationale in the concluding sentence of the case? Would it be appropriate for Daniels to proceed with publishing the paper? What are Woodjade's and Daniel's rights with respect to the data and the publication of the data?
5. Assume that any of the added authors in fact reviewed and commented on all drafts of the paper in question. Could this contribution to the effort be significant enough to merit authorship?

Notes

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Contributor(s)

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Case Study / Scenario

Topics

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Collaboration

Mentors and Trainees

Publication Ethics

Discipline(s)

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Research Ethics

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