How many codes of research conduct do we need?

Ping Sun
Office of Research Integrity
Ministry of Science and Technology, China

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The codes of conduct in China

* Developed by different agencies and institutions
  * Government departments
  * Universities and research institutions
  * the national academies and learned societies
* In different forms
  * Guidelines for ethical conduct of research
  * Norms for special activities etc.
* For different audiences
  * all science workers
  * member of universities or research institutions
  * academicians and journal editors, etc.
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Examples of “national” codes

- China Association for Science and Technology (2007). *The Norms of Scientific Ethics for Science Workers (Trial)*
- A committee under the Ministry of Education (2009). *The Guidelines on Academic Norms of Humanities and Social Science Studies for Universities*
- A research group commissioned by the Office of Research Integrity, Ministry of Science and Technology (2009). *The Guidelines on Research-Related Integrity*
Elements to be considered

1. Function (guidelines/code/norms/rules...)
2. Authority (the agency, content, procedure...)
3. Jurisdiction (Institutional/Disciplinary/professional...)
4. Audience (general/specific disciplines...)
5. Content (length, level of detail, clarity...)
6. Implementation (inspirational/enforceable)
7. Effectiveness (response, assessment...)

Problems with an ordinary code

1. Purpose
   - A code is adopted as a guidance for a specific audience, while its core principles are often universal ones (repetitive).

2. Content
   - Both proper and improper behaviors are listed, while the lists cannot exhaust all such behaviors.
   - Behaviors (proper and improper) are often poorly defined.

3. Implementation
   - A code was usually well publicized at the time of issuance, but it is not clear whether the target audience being aware of it.
   - Do not know how the code influences behavior.
Objectives and strategies

- **Objectives**
  1. A one- or two pages code with critical principles (e.g. Hippocrates: The Oath of Medicine), instead of a full length document
  2. Professional codes, instead of institutional ones
  3. International codes (e.g. Singapore Statement)

- **Strategies**
  1. To assess the effectiveness of the existing codes;
  2. To increase the relevance of the codes with the audience, e.g. through audit and enforcement;
  3. To develop supplementary norms and regulations.