

## **Collaborative Discussion 2 – Research Methods and Professional Practice –**

### **Initial Post – Michael Geiger**

The case study about Abi, which examines the nutritional content of the new cereal Whizzz, clearly illustrates the legal, social and professional responsibilities of scientific workers.

In general, scientific work should follow the principle of researching impartially, financially independently and unaffected by any kind of manipulation. However, research sometimes requires large financial resources and industry is a key funder. In 2018, 1.3 billion Euros for public research work in Germany came from state sources, while companies contributed a total of around 25 billion Euros to the financing of public research (Kästner, 2020). This can result in a dependency structure where the results of published studies are influenced by stakeholders, as has been shown for example in the food industry (Mandrioli et al., 2016).

Because of these circumstances, it should be noted that 'scientific "truth" is the primary aim that all should pursue in the jungle of academic-industry interactions' (Eisman & Lorenzo, 2007). However, scientific truth is not to be understood as one-dimensional and absolute, but rather as relative (Iso-Ahola, 2020). Factors such as the context, the location in time, methods as well as internal and external conditions influence research results and the respective interpretation of them.

While this consideration of scientific truth offers researchers a certain scope for action and interpretation for research, ethically correct behaviour should be reflected on, especially in cooperation with sponsors. Sponsorship bias and the influence of interest groups should be actively prevented (Doucet & Sismondo, 2008).

With regard to the case study of the cereal Whizzz, two perspectives should be considered. On the one hand, a specifically positive interpretation of the research results to the advantage of the company can represent a significant health-damaging consequence for the consumer, so that a potential risk for people can be identified. On the other hand, a negative interpretation, if not clearly proven, can mean financial damage or damage to the company's reputation. Both perspectives that suggest bias should be avoided.

A transparent as well as objective methodology and evaluation with subsequent discussion of the results is therefore absolutely necessary to prevent bias. It does not have to be ruled out that several conclusions can be supported. Abi would thereby behave in a scientifically and ethically correct manner. The same behaviour is to be required from the manufacturer in the next step.

## References:

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