Case 1 – data sharing

You request the data for a 2006 paper in 2011 (i.e., within five years). Upon this request, the original researcher responds that he/she is currently incapacitated to respond to your request (e.g., the death of a spouse). You understand and let it rest, but follow up one year later (i.e., 2012). Upon this new request, the original researcher responds and states that he/she cannot share the data because the data are deleted, considering that the professional organization has a data retention rule of 5 years.

* Is the behavior by the original researcher a breach of integrity and/or ethics?

Case 2 – mistake

You have conducted a study with a colleague and published the results. The study was an extension of previous work and has received much interest when you presented it at a conference earlier this year. The research paper has been published now as well, but you discover you made an error in the analysis script, using an incorrect, incomplete data file.

Despite this error, your substantive conclusions hold, but the numeric values and sample sizes of the study change, because the complete dataset included some additional participants. It was an honest error on your part, but you feel bad because it is your fault all the numbers are incorrect.

* Do you tell your colleague?
* Would you adjust all the numbers and send out a corrigendum to the journal, to correct your mistake? Why so? --- If not, why not?

See backside for case 3

Case 3– allegation

You read a paper by a colleague that raises certain suspicions of data fabrication. You talk to this colleague and ask about the peculiarities, but these concerns are waived and the raw data are not shared even though you request them. The colleague stresses that any mention of this would be bad for his/her reputation. Nonetheless, you write up a report of your concerns and supporting evidence and send it to the university counselor (i.e., “vertrouwenspersoon”), who initiates an investigation based on your report.

The results of the investigation show that there was data fabrication at play by the colleague. The colleague is now fired. A few colleagues applaud you for doing the right thing, despite you feeling quite ambivalent about the result. The rest of your department is now extra careful around you in research projects, because even though you found a threat to the department, a messenger can get a bad reputation.

* Do you think this approach is reasonable or objectionable, taking into account your colleagues’ explicit objections?
* Would you do anything about the situation with the colleague, and if so, how?
* Do you still stand by the action you took?
* What would you have done differently?