HGO4010 Assessment Exercise 2 (Case problem): **Breach of trust**

## Instruction to students (shared in Canvas and class at the start of the semester)

The case problem exam question will be revealed to you at the start of the 10-day home exam   
period.  
  
The case problem will give you an opportunity to show your ability to apply your methodological   
competence to a pre-given topic. As with the research proposal, you will be assessed on your ability   
to make methodological choices, and to reflect and communicate these choices in a convincing   
manner. In other words, this is not a test of your understanding of the details of the subject matter,   
but on your ability to apply you methodological competence to a context somebody else has chosen   
for you.   
  
The best preparation for the case problem is an active participation in group and individual exercises   
throughout the semester.   
  
The text cannot exceed 2000 words. It can be structured as you see fit, as long as you answer the   
question given to you.

## Exam question (announced at the start of the exam period)

Your assignment is to demonstrate your ability to tackle a practical methodological situation.

You tackle the case problem by writing a 2000-word text written as a retrospective reflection the choices you have made in a hypothetical situation. Write as if you evaluate your research process in hindsight, using the same writing format and retrospective style that is common in the methods chapter of a master thesis.

BRIEF

You decided to write your thesis about climate change policies and their impact on a local community, which depends on a carbon-intensive workplace. You were motivated by the relevance of the topic – both academically and politically. You were particularly interested in how workers at such a workplace perceive and act upon the climate debate and climate policy targets of zero carbon emissions – which will change the conditions of work. You chose a case study on Company X in Community Z. Your research questions was: “How do workers in Company Xperceive and act upon the climate change policies?”.

You started by acquainting yourself with the relevant literature, including on labour, just transition and climate change. For your methodological design, you decided upon a data collection strategy based on interviews with 10-15 workers at Company X. The research topic – is a sensitive issue enveloped in a polarised public debate, where interests are vested and feelings strong. Therefore, as a first step in data collection, you have established direct contact with the trade union leader at Company X. You have met once and communicated through social media. You have presented your research plans, and the union leader has agreed to act as your gatekeeper, by reflecting on issues and research design and by helping to get access to other workers.

CASE PROBLEM

When reading news about climate change and labour, you come over an opinion piece in a newspaper, written by a nationally well-known climate activist. You find the piece thought-provoking and share it on a social media platform. The following day, your union contact/gatekeeper calls you. Referring to the post you shared, the union leader expresses doubts. S/he does not consider you a neutral researcher and withdraws his/her cooperation with you.

Describe how you dealt with the situation, in retrospect, and in particular the following considerations: How did you evaluate the situation? What kind of measures did you take? How did you relate to the gatekeeper? Did you revise your research questions, design and/or data collection strategy?

## Examiner’s guide

As the exam is a test of the students’ ability to combine knowledge from different parts of the curriculum and seminar series, and explicitly asks students to demonstrate practical methodological abilities, it is very hard to assess exactly what the best assignments would look like. Students would have to think creatively and independently, and I think this ability is more important in the overall assessment than detailed knowledge of particular issues. The best assignments would solve the case problem with a combination of alternative methods and provide an honest assessment of the thought exercise.

The students from 2019 through 2023 have suggested criteria for evaluating rigour retrospectively in a report on conducted research:

* **The best reports show clear and open reporting of methodological choices and practices**
  + This could include being clear on what kind of interpretation framework is used This could include clear and critical reporting on data collection methods
  + This could include clarifying alternative choices based on issues of access
* **The best reports should demonstrate reflexive management, including by showing how the researcher reflected on and adapted to dilemmas (cf. the ‘case problem’)**
  + This could include being open about the researchers’ positionality
  + This could include relevant checks and balances with your interpretative community and your research field
  + This could include referring to memos, a research diary or other techniques documenting flexibility and reflexivity along the process
  + This could include reflcting on ethical issues and demonstrating how ethical dilemmas were dealt with through open reporting
* **The best reports should demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity to emergent themes throughout the process**
  + This could include accounting for the experiences of agents that it portrayed in the research
* **The best reports should be explicit on issues of rigour, not assume these virtues implicitly**
  + This could include recognising researcher influence
  + This could include showing how perspectives and/or sources were triangulated
  + This could include demonstrating transferability by contextualising the case in the field of study
* **The best reports combine creativity and rigour**