

## Retractions Are Difficult—Perhaps They Shouldn't Be

Ute Stephan, King's College London, outgoing Editor-in-Chief of *Applied Psychology: An International Review*

When the authors of Thurik, R., Khedhaouria, A., Torrès, O., & Verheul, I. (2016). ADHD symptoms and entrepreneurial orientation of small firm owners. *Applied Psychology*, 65(3), 568–586 first approached me to say that they wanted to retract the paper my heart sank. This was an innovative and well-cited study that together with others helped draw attention to clinical symptoms and entrepreneurship. The authors wanted to retract, because they could not reproduce one of the main results of their paper due to an error in their datafile.

My first thought was that a retraction is a bad thing—for the journal and the authors. This first thought was clearly shaped by many recent high-profile retractions where in the worst cases researchers deliberately mislead readers about their data. Sadly, this is probably how most of us will react to retractions. Yet further thought made me feel that a retraction can be seen in a positive light, especially when it originates from the authors. I am not suggesting it is a pleasant experience for anybody involved (authors, editors, journal), yet it is a reflection of an honest way of working. Even with a rigorous peer review process and with each one of us double and triple checking results and papers at every stage of the process, we are only human, and we are bound to make mistakes occasionally and accidentally. To reach out to editors and journals to acknowledge one's mistake takes courage. Thus, while handling the retraction process and the review process of the research note that supplements and corrects the retracted paper, I could not help wondering how many times authors discover mistakes (e.g., in datasets) and how many of those discoveries remain unreported. Critically, under what circumstances do such discoveries lead to corrigenda or retractions of papers?

The publication process is difficult and challenging, so we can become attached to the published article and we fear our reputation gets tarnished if we retract a paper. Yet if retractions were to be seen as a necessary part of scientific working that corrects occasional mistakes, it would be much easier for authors to come forward and not fear the process. As applied psychologists we know about the importance of making people feel safe to speak up. Ultimately, more retractions and corrections by authors would enhance the quality of work in our discipline.