

UNESCO Ethics of Science and Technology Programmes and Research-Policy Linkages

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The policy dimension of ethics of science and technology is obvious

- Adopting principles (typically based on political consensus)
- Designing and implementing mechanisms (e.g. ethics committees, codes of conduct...)
- Shaping behaviour by embedding in routine practice (e.g. ethics education, awareness-raising...)

BUT DO WE NEED RESEARCH?

A zero-research model for ethics of science and technology?

- **Principles** from philosophical reflection or directly from religious or cultural background frameworks
- **Mechanisms** follow directly from obligations/prohibitions in principles
- **Education** is telling people what to do and what not to do

**WE CAN EASILY AGREE THAT
THIS MODEL DOESN'T WORK**

What's wrong with the “zero-research model”?

- **Principles** do not simply need grounding: they must also be **relevant** and broadly **acceptable**
- **Mechanisms** must be shown to **work** in real-world conditions of **uncertainty** and widely distributed **responsibility**
- **Education** is helping people understand how to **act** in complex and unforeseen **situations**

4 policy-relevant tasks for research

- Analysis of scientific and technological challenges to identify key ethical concerns **(relevance)**
- Understanding of social, cultural and religious diversity as it bears on possible ethical principles **(acceptability)**
- Analysis of key issues in policy design **(implementation)**
- Understanding of social/institutional drivers of ethical vs unethical behaviour **(embedding)**

THESE TASKS CALL ON THE FULL RANGE OF SHS DISCIPLINES AND ON A STRONG INTERFACE WITH THE NATURAL SCIENCES

Some examples from ongoing UNESCO programmes

- Identifying the challenges of nanotechnologies and converging technologies (**relevance**)
- Understanding the normative basis of environmental ethics, with particular reference to climate change (**acceptability**)
- Analysis of codes of scientific conduct with a view to developing a general ethical framework to guide scientific activity (**implementation**)
- Investigating research misconduct and understanding its dynamics (**embedding**)

**ALL OF WHICH WILL BE DISCUSSED
IN THE ORDINARY SESSION OF
COMEST THAT STARTS TOMORROW**