

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee



UNESCO

Topic A

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Topic A: The Uses and Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

About UNESCO

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences, and Culture. UNESCO's programs contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

The United Nations has seen it evident that political and economic arrangements of governments are not enough to secure the lasting and sincere support of the peoples. Peace must be founded upon dialogue and mutual understanding and built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity. These are some of the principles that the committee is built on.

UNESCO's founding vision was born in response to a world war that was marked by racist and anti-Semitic violence. Seventy years on and many liberation struggles later, UNESCO's mandate is as relevant as ever. Cultural diversity is under attack and new forms of intolerance, rejection of scientific facts, and threats to freedom of expression, challenge peace and human rights. In response, UNESCO's duty remains to reaffirm the importance of humanist missions of education, science, and culture.

History of UNESCO

As early as 1942, in wartime, the governments of the European countries, which were confronting Nazi Germany and its allies, met in the United Kingdom for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME). Upon the proposal of CAME, a United Nations Conference for the establishment of an educational and cultural organization (ECO/CONF) was convened in London from 1 to 16 November 1945. Scarcely had the war ended when the conference opened. It gathered together the representatives of forty-four countries who decided to create an organization that would embody a genuine culture of peace. In their eyes, the new organization must establish the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” and, in so doing, prevent the outbreak of another world war

Topic Overview:

The term “Artificial Intelligence” was first used by John McCarthy to denote machines that could think autonomously. He described the threshold as “getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence.”

Artificial intelligence algorithms are designed to make decisions, often using real-time data. They are unlike passive machines that are capable only of mechanical or predetermined responses. Using sensors, digital data, or remote inputs, AI can combine information from a variety of different sources, analyze the material instantly, and act on the insights derived from those data. As such, these machines are designed by humans with intentionality and for the purpose of reaching conclusions based on their instant analysis.

There have been extraordinary advances in recent years regarding the ability of AI to incorporate intentionality, intelligence, and adaptability in their algorithms. Rather than being mechanistic or deterministic in how the machines operate, AI software learns as it goes along and incorporates real-world experience in its decision-making. These advances also make people nervous about doomsday scenarios sensationalized by movie-makers. Situations where AI-powered robots take over humans or weaken basic values frightens people and leads them to wonder whether AI is making a useful contribution or if it holds too high of a risk for humans.

A Tremendous Opportunity for Sustainable Development

The transformations arising from the technological revolution, and in particular from developments in AI, are relevant to every aspect of the mandate of UNESCO. Education is already being profoundly transformed by AI. Very soon, the tools of education—the way we learn, access knowledge, and train teachers—will no longer be the same. From now on, the acquisition of digital skills stands at the center of all our education programs. Furthermore, we must “learn to learn” because the pace of innovation is rapidly transforming the labor market. Today, more than ever before, the humanities—history, philosophy, literature—are crucial to our ability to act in our rapidly changing world. In the field of culture, AI is already being employed extensively, for example, in the imagery used to reconstruct heritage. It is used in the sciences too, notably in our environmental programs and underwater research. Communication and information are also directly dependent on progress in AI, particularly with regard to freedom of expression and access to information.

AI could open up tremendous opportunities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its applications enable innovative solutions, improved risk assessment, better planning, and faster knowledge sharing.

Tackling the Challenges of Artificial Intelligence

While AI is an astonishing asset for the responsible development of our societies, it also gives rise to major ethical issues. How can we ensure that algorithms do not infringe fundamental human rights—from privacy and data confidentiality to freedom of choice and freedom of conscience? Can freedom of action be guaranteed when our desires are anticipated and guided? How can we ensure that social and cultural stereotypes are not replicated in AI programming, notably when it comes to gender discrimination? Can these circuits be duplicated? Can values be programmed, and by whom? How can we ensure accountability when decisions and actions are fully automated? How do we make sure that no one—wherever they are in the world—is deprived of the benefits of these technologies? How do we ensure that AI is developed in a transparent way, so that global citizens, whose lives it affects, have a say in its development?

To answer these questions, we must distinguish between the immediate effects of AI on our societies and its long-term ramifications. This requires that we collectively shape a vision for the future and a strategic plan of action.

Establishing Global Dialogue on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: the Role of UNESCO

The world must ensure that new technologies, especially those based on AI, are used for the good of our societies and their sustainable development. It should regulate AI developments and applications so that they conform to the fundamental rights that frame our democratic horizon.

Many actors—businesses, research centers, science academies, United Nations Member States, international organizations, and civil society associations—are calling for an ethical framework for AI development. While there is a growing understanding of the issues, related initiatives need more robust coordination. This issue is global, and reflection on it must take place at the global level so as to avoid a ‘pick-and-choose’ approach to ethics. Furthermore, an inclusive, global approach, with the participation of United Nations funds, agencies, and programs, is required if we are to find ways of harnessing AI for sustainable development.

UNESCO will be a full and active participant in this global conversation. Our organization has many years of experience in the ethics of science and technology. Our advisory bodies have already produced numerous reports and declarations, including on robotics, such as the Report of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology on Robotics Ethics in 2017. The advisory bodies also have experience in developing normative instruments, including the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights in 1997 and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights in 2005.

UNESCO priorities must also guide our international action in this area. It is essential to ensure that Africa fully participates in transformations related to AI, not only as a beneficiary but also upstream, contributing directly to its development. In terms of gender equality, we must fight against the biases in our societies to guarantee that they are not reproduced in AI applications. Finally, we must empower young people by providing them with the skills they need for life in the twenty-first century for integration in a changing labor market.

UNESCO also has a key role to play in bridging existing divides, which AI is likely to deepen. Eliminating fragmentation between countries and genders, but also in terms of resources and knowledge, could enable more people to contribute to the digital transformation underway.

UNESCO, with its humanist mission and international dimension, involving researchers, philosophers, programmers, policymakers, and private sector and civil society representatives, is the natural home for debate on such ethical issues. Beginning later this year, UNESCO will organize debates on AI in several regions of the world, bringing together specialists from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise. The first debate, which took place in Marrakech, Morocco, on 12 December 2018, focused on AI and Africa. A second international conference will take place at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in the first half of 2019. This dialogue could eventually lead, with the agreement of Member States, to the definition of key ethical principles to accompany developments in AI.

UNESCO, as a universal forum where everyone's voice is heard and respected, is performing its role to the fullest, informing the global debate on the major transformations of our time while establishing principles to ensure that technological advances are used to serve the common good. The promise of AI and its underlying ethical issues are fascinating, and our responses to these challenges will transform the world as we know it.

UNESCO Activities regarding AI:

1. Description of Activities on AI:

UNESCO will focus its efforts on strategic actions and objectives in the areas of ethics, policy, and capacity building, in line with the expected results of its Programme and Budget, 2018-2021 (document 39 C/5) and in response to new emerging challenges related to AI technologies across all Major Programmes:

1) Positioning UNESCO as a platform for international intellectual debate on AI: A high-level multi-stakeholder event on the Ethical, Social and Human Rights Implications of Artificial Intelligence is planned on 18 January 2019 in Paris to launch the new UNESCO initiative on AI. The event would be designed around the ethical dimensions of AI, to collectively:

- Reflect on how AI is transforming or could transform societies in each of UNESCO's fields of competence, including fundamental philosophical reflection on what it means to be human in the face of disruptive technologies;

- Identify the potential risks and benefits of such transformations in each of these areas, especially with regard to ethical, social and human rights implications;
- Identify and frame the concrete questions that need to be addressed through UNESCO's actions and objectives in ethics, policy and capacity building;
- Formulate some preliminary proposals on responses to these questions in each of these areas. A series of smaller events to raise awareness about AI amongst the Member States and other stakeholders will be organized in cooperation with relevant partners prior to and after the high-level event. Particular emphasis will be put on capturing regional cultural and ethnic diversity in the interpretation of AI and its challenges.

2) Setting ethical norms and standards:

The way in which societies are transformed and the motivation behind the development and use of technologies, such as AI, need to be understood and accompanied by ethical reflection, as they are based on values either they are based on ungrounded scientific knowledge. From an ethical perspective, UNESCO will focus on:

- a) A normative reflection to identify or “create” ethical principles to respond to the ethical questions raised, and to guide the development and application of AI accordingly;
- b) reflection on the need for and manner to achieve fairness, accountability, transparency, gender equality, cultural diversity in AI, to ensure that AI-driven decisions respect human dignity and protect fundamental human rights. The possible goal of such reflection is consideration by UNESCO’s governing bodies of a normative instrument on

the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Producing policy solutions: The rapid development of AI technologies requires UNESCO to support Member States that struggle to keep up with the tremendous pace of innovation and change. In this regard, the Organization will work on producing innovative policy solutions for the governance of AI, using evidence-based research to formulate policy recommendations, guidelines, and toolkits for governments, policymakers, and other actors, in relation to the development and use of AI in education, the sciences, culture and communication and information. UNESCO will also work on providing technical assistance to policymakers, governments, and judicial actors on relevant ethical principles and international human rights standards related to AI.

The Future of Military Applications of Artificial Intelligence

As militaries around the world seek to gain a strategic edge over their adversaries by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) innovations into their arsenals, how can members of the international community effectively reduce the unforeseen risks of this technological competition? We argue that pursuing confidence-building measures (CBMs), a class of information-sharing and transparency-enhancing arrangements that states began using in the Cold War to enhance strategic stability, could offer one model of managing AI-related risk today. Analyzing the conditions that led to early CBMs suggests such measures, however, will unlikely succeed today without being adapted to current conditions. In the absence of combat experiences involving novel military technology, it is difficult for states to be certain how these innovations change the implicit rules of warfare. Pursuing international dialogue, in ways that borrow from the Cold War CBM toolkit, may help speed the learning process about the implications of military applications of AI in ways that reduce the risk that states' uncertainty about changes in military technology undermine international security and stability.

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