An ethical approach to the development of social acceptance & its application

UNECE 27 March 2024
Development of Data ethics- key enabler of social acceptance

• Paper developed by Expert Group on ESS Strategic Consultation
• Led by Ireland, Canada and the UK in consultation with Eurostat
• Themes
  • Legal access not enough- higher standard of social acceptance
  • Using an ethical lens to create trust
  • Proactive role in communicating this to society
  • Proactive role in leading on data ethics
Social Acceptance...

What do we mean?

- Gaining and retaining society’s approval for our work
- Retaining trust to use data to provide statistics and services for the public good and in the public interest
- A standard beyond mere compliance with personal data protection laws and beyond legislation governing statistical organisations
- Using data in an ethical way, embedding ethical considerations into statistical production and organisational processes

Remember

- A legal right to data is not the same as having the social approval to use the data
Why now?

We have been focusing on

• Increasing use of secondary (admin and privately held) data
• Growing demand for better and more timely insights from users
• Legal compliance in accessing data

We also need to consider

• Changing social attitudes to privacy; loss of trust and fake news
• Increasing public awareness of data volumes and linkage opportunities
• Growing data ethics discussions
• Potential of increased access to privately held data i.e. EU Regulation 223 revision
Building social acceptance of our work

- **Trust**
  - Key to all that we do
  - Trust is earned not built and can be lost very easily
  - Achieved trust through *living and demonstrating our values*

- **Ethics**
  - Changing times require a new enabler of trust: Ethics
  - Moving towards using ethics to build social acceptance for our work
  - Application of ethical considerations can provide evidence on which to build trust
Use of an ethical lens

• It might be legal BUT is it seen as **right or wrong** and who decides this?
• How can we apply an ethical lens to our organisations to gather the **evidence** of our trustworthiness?
• How can we build ethics into our data processes?
  • Design, build, collection, processing, analysis and communication in both survey and administrative data
• We also need to **listen, understand, and communicate** clearly what we are doing and why – we need communications and engagement strategies
An Ethical Lens...

Internal
Ethics Culture, Structures and Processes inform work

External: Project Specific
Tailored communications & engagement strategies

External: Foundation Layer
High level communications & engagement strategy around earning trust
Learning from the Canadian and UK experiences
Canadian approach to building trust

• Created a high-powered **Data Ethics Secretariat** within Stats Canada
• Adopted a **Necessity and Proportionality Framework**
• Every proposal for a new project or data acquisition must explain
  • why it is important,
  • what the **benefits** are to Canadians,
  • who needs the information and
  • address ethical considerations such as privacy, transparency, and fairness.
• Developed a comprehensive **Trust Centre** on the website
• Framework for Responsible Use of Machine Learning developed based on respect for people, respect for data, sound methods and sound applications
UK- developing a data ethics culture

• Developed a set of ethical principles for research where using the data
  • Has clear benefits for users and serves the public good while
  • Protecting the data subject’s identity, keeping the information confidential and secure, and respecting consent
  • Complying with all relevant legal requirements
  • Considering the risks and limits of new technologies and ensuring sufficient human oversight so that methods employed are consistent with recognised standards of integrity and quality and
  • Ensuring that the access, use and sharing of data is transparent, and is communicated clearly

• Embedded data ethics in statistical culture by
  • Providing high quality training to support analysts’ use of the principles
  • Developing a self assessment ethical tool to enable analysts quickly assess their project
  • Being prominent and vocal in shaping the culture and developing evidence of the use of data ethics
Applying the ethical lens to your own organisation
Key takeaways from their experiences...

• Don’t assume because you have done it before, that it is accepted
• Leverage the idea of the public good
• Harness the persuasive power of what’s in it for me – and what’s in it for society
• Develop proactive communications and engagement regarding Trust
Ethics as an enabler of trust

1. **Internal Focus:**
   - Develop an Ethical Framework and **evaluate** how mature your organisation is
   - **Embed ethics** in your business processes and organisational culture
   - Compile the **evidence** of your ethical approach by developing demonstration projects

2. **External Focus:**
   - Develop a high level communication and engagement strategy around earning trust
   - Develop developing tailored communications & engagement strategies and **audience-specific messaging** around the purpose and value of our work
   - Lead on the development of an ethical data culture in the broader research and statistical communities
   - Consider key audiences e.g. data suppliers, general public, media, decision makers, Data Commissioner, interested parties etc...
How can we

• Develop a broad framework that defines what NSIs could consider when considering data ethics?

• Develop ways of embedding that framework within the statistical production process so that data ethics happens in practice?

• Communicate this work to different audiences so that data ethics can be an enabler of social acceptability?
Application in Ireland
Ethics in Frameworks for Decision Making

• Clear Corporate Governance Framework guiding statistical program with emphasis on ethics, purpose and proportionality

• New Senior Management Group committee on Ethics Development

• Participation in and alignment to international discussions on best practices

• Liaison/steering group structure for engagement with external stakeholders on key releases such as Sexual Violence Survey or Growing Up in Ireland

• Census Advisory Group to inform Census questions
Trust & Communications

• New Trust section on CSO website outlining what the CSO does and how we do it:
  • Key themes of: data collection; data protection; data ethics; confidentiality; and transparency
• Redoubling focus on trust in external communications including on utilisation of administrative data
  • Count on Us marketing campaign
  • Stakeholder engagement
• Alignment of external and internal communications messaging