ETHICS AND AI IN PRACTICE – WORKING TOGETHER AND LEARNING TOGETHER

Platform PACE: Participative and Constructive Ethics

NL AI Coalition

INHOUDSOPGAVE

1. PACE: THE NL AIC PLATFORM FOR PARTICIPATIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ETHICS

The *Participative And Constructive Ethics* (PACE) platform brings together activities related to the ethical aspects of AI applications. It is about connecting knowledge and practice to designing and redesigning ethics in AI and the application environment. The platform is part of the Human Centric AI building block of the Netherlands AI Coalition and it uses the 'learning community of practice' approach.

- *Learning*: **it is about learning together and from each other.**

- *Community*: **the community – the platform – is where practical learning takes place across the boundaries of different disciplines, organisations or projects. It is based on a common focus. That is also what demarcates the community.**

- *Practice*: **it is not about learning for learning's sake – it is about learning from and for the practical side. The community aims to have an impact and draws its inspiration from practice.**

The PACE platform focuses on:

- *AI, the environment and the application environment:* the platform focuses on artificial intelligence (AI) and the environment in which that technology is applied.

- *Practically oriented:* the platform focuses on real-world AI applications. It is not so much aimed at generic ethics discussions about AI as at practical applications and actions that can be taken.

- *Participative:* human centric ethics also means that people who are involved in AI applications or affected by them play a role in creating and implementing the ethics.

- *Constructive ethics:* the terms 'constructive' or 'designing' show that improvements are being looked for. Constructive ethics focuses not so much on clarification or judgement as on actions that can be taken to shape AI and its applications more ethically.

- *Netherlands AI Coalition:* PACE is part of the Human Centric AI block. That means that we are actively looking to collaborate with:

- *ELSA Labs:* the concept of the ELSA Labs has been developed from within the Human Centric AI building block of the Netherlands AI Coalition (NL AIC). PACE involves the various ELSA labs (both the existing ones and those that are being set up) in cooperation on ethics.

- *Application areas:* the NL AIC has thirteen different application areas, which are at different stages of development and vary in size. PACE is the place for cooperation on ethical aspects of the fields of application. In this respect, it also has an outward-facing 'front desk' function.

  o *AI hubs:* the NL AIC collaborates with seven regional AI hubs. The same approach applies to them as to the fields of application.

  o *Human Centric AI:* in addition to ethics as a leitmotif, this building block has two more lines: legal and social dialogue. The LegalAir platform has been set up from the Legal side, addressing legal questions related to AI. For the social dialogue, an AI Parade is being prepared through which there will be interaction at libraries with the residents of the Netherlands. Where possible, useful and necessary, PACE collaborates with those lines.

- *National and international:* the NL AIC is a national platform that focuses on the ethical development of AI and technology in the Netherlands. So there will be an eye kept on national developments in politics, administration and society. On top of that, international developments will be monitored.

- *Togetherness:* a community can only be workable if those involved want to learn from each other, share information and sometimes do things that not only strengthen their own organisations but also serve the common interests.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Netherlands AI Coalition is a public-private partnership in which governmental authorities, the commercial sector, educational and research institutions and social organisations work together to accelerate AI developments in the Netherlands and link AI initiatives in the country together. The coalition is organised along three dimensions: by region through the seven AI hubs, by sector through application areas, and across the sectors through building blocks for cross-sector challenges.

One of those building blocks is Human Centric AI. In this working group, the concept of the ELSA Labs was developed further and made suitable for the NL AIC. It is one of the tools that have been awarded funding by the National Growth Fund from the AiNed programme, in which calls are made for this subject in cooperation with the implementing organisations. ELSA stands for Ethical, Legal and Societal Aspects. In addition to defining the development of the ELSA Labs, the letters E, L and S are the three focal themes within the Human Centric AI building block.

At the end of 2020, the Human Centric AI building block issued a manifesto[1], *Human Centric Artificial Intelligence: A call for sensible and responsible applications*. On the subject of ethics, the following passage was written and it has served as the basis of this position paper.

"All too often, ethics is associated with some kind of external assessment, such as a medical ethics committee assessing whether or not a particular study may be carried out. The ethics of artificial intelligence, however, has to be closely involved with the technology. It is about keeping the interplay between AI, data, people and society on the right track and looking for meaningful and responsible applications in a participative process. This is done by identifying the impact that real-world AI systems and the underlying data can have on people and society, and giving the values affected a place in the design, social embedding and utilisation of those systems.
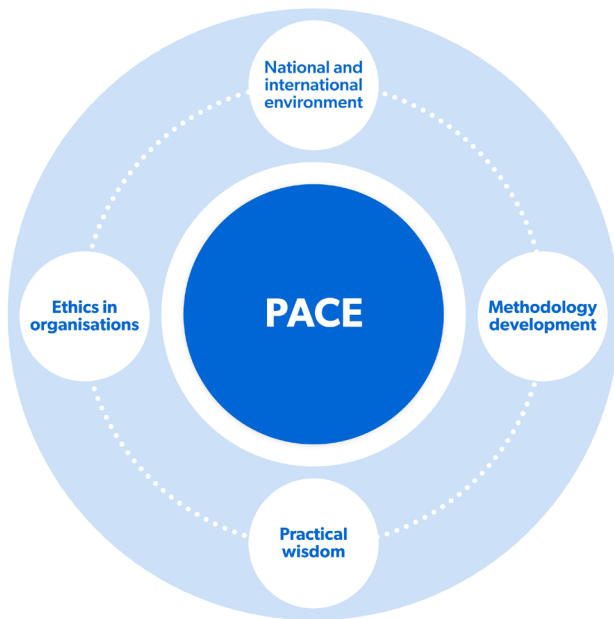
This means that the development of human centric and socially responsible AI based on honest data will go further than the mere formulation of general principles: instead, ethics will be firmly linked to technological practice – it will lead to ethics 'from within' and not just 'from without'. Moreover, this gives ethics a positive role, not only a negative one: in addition to formulating the limits of what we do not want, it focuses on formulating the conditions/courses of action to achieve what we do want."

This position paper gives further details of joint ethical activities for the NL AIC based on this manifesto and for the Human Centric AI building block.

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1. https://nlaic.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Manifest-Mensgerichte-Artificiele-Intelligentie_November-2020.pdf

3. FOUR TARGET AREAS

The four focal themes of the PACE platform's approach are shown in the figure below and explained in more detail in this section.

PRACTICAL WISDOM

The Practical Wisdom focal theme has been placed at the bottom for good reason: it carries the weight of the entire PACE platform. The term 'practical wisdom' has been borrowed from Aristotle, who contrasted it with theoretical knowledge. Whereas theoretical knowledge has a generic validity that is independent of the circumstances, practical wisdom is about where, when and with whom something happens – it is wisdom gained and passed on in practice. This practical wisdom is by definition more difficult to transfer. Of course, there is nothing against theoretical knowledge and the two types cross-fertilise each other.

Practical knowledge of ethics comes primarily from the various parties involved in a case or a topic. From their various perspectives, those concerned have a good idea of the values involved in an AI application and the possible solutions. This can be supplemented by generically formulated values and suggestions from an expert. Another important aspect of

practical wisdom is the greater involvement that arises when different actors can each give their input in an open dialogue and see some of their suggestions become reality.

The question, of course, is how we can learn from practice. How do we acquire that practical wisdom? The answer is by doing, sharing and learning.

- **DOING:**

  Ethics is something you have to do. It should be a natural part of any AI process, from initial development to widespread roll-out and always based on appropriate participation (ensuring consideration of different values) and focused on ethical options for the actions to take. The PACE platform encourages ethical actions around AI applications and developments wherever possible.

- **SHARING:**

  Experience gained from ethical actions should be shared as widely as possible, including across sectors and fields of application.

- **LEARNING:**

  Participants in the PACE platform want to learn from practice. What effects and values play a role, and in which circumstances? What courses of action emerge and are they more widely applicable? Can they be developed further and made available? What are the process effects of a dialogue about ethics?

This leads to a continuous exchange of case histories, with the emphasis on the chosen solution direction and how this has worked out in practice. This is not only about exchanging best practices that have worked, but also about learning from ones that did not.

ETHICS IN ORGANISATIONS/NETWORKS

It is important for organisations and networks to implement and safeguard ethics. How do you integrate ethics into the innovation process, into business processes and between network partners? How do you organise ethical courses of action and where do the ethical decisions fall? How do you communicate about it with the outside world? These are important questions for every organisation that works with AI. For some of the parties, this still requires more awareness and that will be implemented and promoted by the platform too.

Whereas ethics in organisations is largely traditionally organised top-down for compliance, i.e. meeting corporate values and ethical frameworks, we have started from participative and constructive bottom-up ethics for the PACE platform. We focus on the question of how ethics can be given a place within organisations and networks. Instead of being a review committee of experts, an ethics committee may for instance be a committee that organises ethics within the organisation, ensures that several parties are involved as a matter of course and can deploy their ethical capacities with a focus on constructive and ethical courses of action. Another question within this focal theme is how top-down and bottom-up ethics can coexist, complement each other or hinder each other.

METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Methods are needed for ethical guidance of AI and society. These methods will be developed or elaborated upon further in this focal theme. This will also create a toolkit that is suitable for use in practice. Focus is important here. The platform does not want to present a collection of existing approaches but would rather restrict itself to methods that are in line with the perspective of being both constructive and participative. This focus on a limited number of methods gives the opportunity to develop them seriously.

The methods that are given a place in the platform must meet certain requirements:

- The method must be in line with the PACE philosophy.

- The method must be sufficiently proved in practice.

- There must be a willingness to share the results of sessions.

- The method must be usable for the various application areas and desired by them.

There are several questions surrounding the use of a methodology that will be addressed within this focal theme:

- When should which method be used? That can depend on:
  o The phase within the innovation process.

  o The domain that the AI system operates in.

  o The maturity of the environment in which the methodology is deployed.

  o Specific potential problems related to the techno-logical application in question.

- How do different methods relate to each other? How can they reinforce each other?

- How can you expand an approach into a broader and more mature one? What components are missing?

- What roles or influence do certain groups of participants have? How is the quadruple helix represented? How is the public at large involved?

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The PACE platform is creating a community with its own focus. At the same time, the working group is also in contact with its surroundings through the platform. The relevant communication environment for the platform includes:

- The Netherlands AI Coalition: application areas, ELSA labs and the Human Centric AI working group.

- National developments (including policy development) in AI: from ministries, provinces, municipalities, advisory bodies and supervisory bodies.

- European developments (including policy development): both from the EU and from the relevant member states.

- The wider ethics community around AI: technology.

Within this focal theme, both incoming and outgoing information go via the platform:

- Listening well means that the platform relates to the developments it hears. What does a development mean for the PACE platform? Is there a reaction? Are attempts being made from PACE to make connections? Can the PACE platform be valuable? The aim is to be well-informed and relevant for the immediate environment.

- The Netherlands is at the forefront of Europe both academically (engineering philosophy, ethics and technology, participative policy-making) and practically (ethics development within organisations, case studies). The constructive and participative approach is relatively new. It is an approach that is called for by the times: a constructive dialogue, alongside or in conjunction with the classic forms of ethical frameworks and rules. In addition to helping create ethical AI applications, the approach used by the PACE platform – together with the ELSA Labs – can be an interesting export product.

Ultimately, listening and providing information must result in cooperation. How can the platform actively contribute to better national and European policies? Can cooperation be organised in this field with other countries? Do we have benchmarks? Where can we learn things through the platform?

4. HOW DOES IT WORK?

The PACE platform was launched in mid-2021 as the successor to the working group on normative frameworks from the Human Centric AI building block, the manifesto, and the developments around the ELSA Labs (and the choice of Ethical, Legal and Societal lines). A solid group of participants from business, science, government and society emerged fairly quickly. This position paper is the result of the dialogue that took place within that group. At heart, it is about two things: sharing knowledge and working together.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Meetings of the PACE platform participants are held every six weeks. Participants share what they are doing and there is scope for a 'special topic'. Among other things, there have been presentations from various ELSA Labs (existing ones and those that are being set up), about the ethical methods called The Ethical Data Assistant (DEDA) and The guidance ethics approach (ABE), about the application of ethics at a bank and within a major IT player, and about a research programme for responsive hybrid intelligence. Developments in ethics in the Netherlands and elsewhere are also discussed. These meetings are well-liked and remain an important part of PACE's working method.

In addition, people share articles and details of conferences, cases, etc. That information is shared on the NL AIC website and joint products are being developed, which will of course also be shared.

COOPERATION

From the platform's viewpoint, we see the four focal themes as the playing field: the various directions in which the platform wants to develop. A core team monitors those four areas. The platform has decided not to create working groups for the specific areas of interest but instead to focus on activities and products, which we refer to as 'product groups'. These are

teams that work together to come up with specific products that are useful for PACE: practical lessons, scientific articles, communication tools and improved methods.

Usually, it is an extension of the work that people are already doing. These can originate either from the platform or from a demand from an application area or an ELSA Lab.

At the time of publishing this position paper, the following product groups are being developed:

- Workshop for ethical co-creation of AI.

- Teaching responsible AI.

- AI and Ethics within organisations.

- Maturity model for ethical AI.

- External interaction.

Of course, there will be an ongoing dynamic: new product groups will emerge and others will disappear.

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

We welcome new participants and are open to new knowledge and new perspectives. If you are interested in attending a meeting about participative and constructive ethics, if you have any suggestions or if you would like to work with us actively on this very relevant topic, please contact Edwin Borst (secretary) or Daniël Tijink (chair) via edwin.borst@nlaic.com or go to the website of the Netherlands AI Coalition.