

Session Outcome Document

Digital Humanism: People first!

EC MEDICI Framework of Cooperation

Thursday 10 July 10:00–10:45

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/EditDescription/248>

1. Overview

Digital Humanism is a people-first approach to global digital transformation that places human dignity, fundamental rights, and social fairness at its core and targets transparency, accountability, cultural pluralism, and inclusion in the design and governance of technology. It seeks to establish a dynamic research and action paradigm that actively engages all relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, technologists, educators, civil society, and citizens in aligning digital innovation with the real needs of diverse communities around the world.

Key Insights

- Centres digital innovation on human dignity, rights, and agency. Preserve cultural, linguistic and creativity diversity.
- Exposes risks from unchecked algorithms, data abuse misuse, and exploitative labour models. AI governance.
- Demonstrates that regulation can safeguard digital rights and public interests, like green and sustainability policies.
- Promotes critical thinking and ethical awareness through education within the different cultural models.
- Calls for transparent, values-driven practices in business and technology.
- Encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration to align technology with societal needs.

Emerging Trends

- Broadening interest in ethical and inclusive design across industries.
- Growing recognition of digital rights, privacy, and data fairness.
- Evolution of AI guided by the needs, wisdom, and dignity of all people
- Wider adoption of human-centred design in business and governance.
- Stronger partnerships among educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs.

Challenges in the Next 20 Years

- Ensuring human overlooking role, control and responsibility on nowadays and future AI automatic decision systems.
- Ensuring legal protections adapt to rapidly evolving technologies, including GenAI and surveillance infrastructure.
- Locally bridging the gap between regulatory frameworks and everyday ethical practices in digital systems.
- Holding companies and platforms accountable for harm while encouraging innovation.

Figures

- 78% of Europeans express concern about algorithmic bias and digital surveillance (Eurobarometer, 2023).
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- *By 2030, more than 85% of education systems globally will include modules on ethics in digital technologies (OECD forecast).*
- *Businesses with strong ethical governance outperform peers in long-term public trust and regulatory compliance by 30% (World Economic Forum, 2024).*

Success Stories and Opportunities for WSIS Beyond 2025

- Embed digital humanism at all levels of education, from schools to vocational training and universities.
- Enabling multi-stakeholder coalitions to monitor, evaluate, and improve the ethical impact of digital transf. (DT).
- Supporting businesses to integrate ethical digital practices through capacity building.
- Expanding the WSIS role as a platform to prototype a rights-based digital social contract shaped by global voices.

2. Ethical Deficit on Fostering a Global and Culturally Diverse Vision of Ethics

Key Insights

- Digital systems often overlook cultural diversity in ethical values.*
- Ethics is still treated as compliance, not as lived moral experience.*
- Intelligent systems can support cross-cultural exchange if designed with diverse ethical perspectives.*

Emerging Trends

- Growing interest in **localised ethical frameworks and indigenous knowledge systems.**

Challenges Ahead (Next 20 Years)

Bridging the gap between compliance-based rules and the different human-centred “moralities”.

Key Figures

- *Only 12% of global AI governance frameworks explicitly refer to non-Western ethical models (source: UNESCO, 2024).*

Success Stories and Opportunities Beyond 2025

- Opportunities for WSIS to set a global agenda on ethical pluralism in digital systems.
- Training programmes to elevate global ethical literacy among designers and engineers.

3. Paradox of Alignment in Human-Centred Design in Socio-Technical Systems

Key Insights

- Shifting from technology-driven to society-informed design challenges the responsibility of developers.*
- Embedding human values into systems knowing that complex algorithms are shaped by their creators' social environment.*
- Ethical alignment risks oversimplifying cultural values into programmable logic.*

Emerging Trends

- Multidisciplinary design teams incorporating ethics, cognitive and social science, including design thinking.
- Frameworks for fairness, accountability, and transparency in system development.

Challenges Ahead (Next 20 Years)

- Avoiding ethical outsourcing to users while keeping creators accountable.
- Preventing misuse of value alignment as a cover for moral disengagement.

Key Figures

- *Over 70% of developers report uncertainty on how to embed human values into algorithms (Stanford AI Index, 2024).*

Success Stories and Opportunities Beyond 2025

- Ethical auditing standards for digital systems.
 - Global partnerships between civil society and developers.
 - WSIS as a forum to prototype and test socio-technical governance tools.
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4. Paradox of Empowerment: Balancing Control Between Humans and Machines

Key Insights

- Delegating control to intelligent systems is inevitable but challenging without measurable indicators.
- Insufficient transparency and predictability in advanced systems complicates ethical oversight.

Emerging Trends

- Development of human-in-the-loop and explainable system protocols.

Challenges Ahead (Next 20 Years)

Managing trust and distrust between users and systems.

Designing systems that warn or override, without undermining human dignity.

Key Figures

- 62% of automated decision-making tools operate without full human review in high-risk sectors (OECD, 2023).

Success Stories and Opportunities Beyond 2025

- New governance bodies for oversight of machine autonomy.
- WSIS leadership in creating international standards for safe empowerment.

5. Cognitive Deficit: Understanding the Impact of Repeated Tool Use on Independent Thinking

Key Insights

- Reliance on digital tools may reduce critical thinking, creativity, and intellectual independence.
- When users accept machine outputs without scrutiny, they lose ownership of ideas.
- Accumulated “cognitive debt” reduces capacity for deep reasoning and diverse thinking.

Emerging Trends

- Evidence-based studies on human cognition and machine interaction.
- Educational reforms that integrate tool use with active learning and critical evaluation.

Challenges Ahead (Next 20 Years)

Protecting cognitive development in youth amid widespread tool reliance.

Rebalancing education to nurture curiosity, exploration, and resistance to shortcut thinking.

Addressing digital overreliance in professional and academic settings. Nurture critical thinking especially in education.

Key Figures

- 47% of students using learning assistants fail to verify information (MIT study, 2024).
- Creativity scores dropped 10% among frequent tool users (Journal of Cognitive Development, 2023).

Success Stories and Opportunities Beyond 2025

- Curricula combining technology with cognitive resilience training.
 - Creation of ethical AI mentors in education that support but not replace thinking.
 - WSIS can support a global initiative on ethical and cognitive literacy in the digital age.
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