Reflection: Towards Global Alignment in Generative AI Governance

The rapid spread of generative artificial intelligence (AI) since late 2022 has resulted in long-standing debates about the ethical, social and legal frameworks that should govern computational innovation. As Correa et al. (2023) emphasise, global efforts to codify ethical values for AI have multiplied, resulting in what they call an “AI ethics boom”. Yet despite more than 200 AI governance guidelines analysed across 37 countries, their study reveals a persistent lack of consensus on fundamental principles, coupled with underrepresentation of regions such as Africa and South America. This fragmented landscape underscores the need for stronger international alignment to ensure that generative AI advances in a manner that is ethically coherent, socially responsible, and legally enforceable.

Divergent Ethical Frameworks and Global Disparities

Correa et al. (2023) find that while most AI guidelines converge around recurrent principles, there are striking divergences in interpretation and application. For instance, privacy in Chinese frameworks may permit extensive data extraction in the name of collective benefit, whereas European documents, shaped by GDPR and the EU’s “Trustworthy AI” ethos, treat privacy as an individual right (Jobin, Ienca and Vayena, 2019). Similarly, many national strategies prioritise innovation and competitiveness over enforceable human rights protections. This divergence reflects what the authors call the “abstraction of normative discourse”: ethical ideals are widely stated but rarely operationalised or measurable (Correa et al., 2023).

The imbalance between “soft law” and legally binding regulation is particularly concerning. Correa et al. (2023) show that 98% of the documents they examined are non-binding. The predominance of self-regulatory or voluntary commitments by corporations such as IBM and Microsoft shows a neoliberal governance model, where ethics becomes a branding exercise rather than a compliance requirement. Deckard (2023) underscores this critique, arguing that without regulation, AI ethics risks devolving into performative virtue signalling. He argues that the commercial race to dominate generative AI, outpaces policymakers’ capacity to impose meaningful oversight.

Comparing Normative Traditions: From Belmont to Menlo

Historical ethical frameworks such as the Belmont Report (1979) and the Menlo Report (2012) show parallels. The Belmont Report introduced the principles of *respect for persons*, *beneficence*, and *justice*, each directly applicable to AI systems that process personal data and influence human welfare. The Menlo Report extended these principles to information and communication technologies, adding *respect for law and public interest*. However, as Correa et al. (2023) observe, AI ethics has yet to achieve such institutionalisation: while principles like

transparency or fairness are widely cited, their implementation mechanisms remain "detached from observable metrics or practical tools" (Correa et al., 2023).

A stronger alignment could draw inspiration from these reports by creating a "Belmont for AI": a global framework mandating measurable accountability, clear consent standards, and redress mechanisms. The BCS (2024) similarly advocates that computing professionals uphold integrity, competence and social responsibility, yet its guidance assumes that such obligations are internalised rather than externally enforced. This reliance on professional goodwill is increasingly insufficient in the face of generative AI's scale and opacity.

The Professional and Legal Imperative

For computing professionals, the current regulatory patchwork creates uncertainty. Developers must navigate conflicting expectations: for example, an engineer working for a multinational AI firm may face different compliance obligations under the EU AI Act, U.S. self-regulatory frameworks, and Asian national strategies. Such inconsistency increases the risk of "ethics washing," the selective adoption of principles that favour corporate interests. As Bietti (2020) explains, many companies strategically use ethics language to resist stricter regulation and maintain market freedom, creating a "corporate ethics" discourse that replaces binding oversight with voluntary principles. This patchwork of standards, as Floridi and Cowls (2021) also argue, undermines global trust and slows progress toward responsible, transparent AI systems. Correa et al. (2023) note that the dominance of private and governmental institutions in producing guidelines (48% of their dataset) further tilts the normative discourse toward the interests of the powerful, marginalising perspectives from civil society and the Global South.

A legally binding global framework could mitigate these disparities by establishing minimum ethical baselines. Deckard (2023) warns that, without cross-border accountability, generative AI could increase inequality, misinformation, and algorithmic bias. Strengthening alignment would thus not hinder innovation but rather sustain it under conditions of trust and legitimacy.

Social and Ethical Implications

The social implications of unaligned AI governance are profound. Correa et al. (2023) highlight gender disparities within the authorship of AI guidelines, with two-thirds of contributors being male. Furthermore, ethical frameworks that privilege Western countries, risk neglecting communal or relational ethics prominent in African or Asian contexts (Kiemde and Kora, 2022).

From an ethical standpoint, the absence of enforceable standards threatens public trust. The BCS (2024) emphasises that ethical computing requires transparency,

accountability, and respect for human dignity. Yet generative AI systems frequently operate as “black boxes”, producing outputs whose decision logic is inscrutable even to their creators.

Towards an Aligned Global Strategy

A suitable course of action would be a multi-level governance model that combines international consensus-building with enforceable regional regulation. First, a *Global AI Ethics Council*, modelled on the UN Human Rights Council, could harmonise principles and facilitate dialogue between governments, corporations, and civil society. Second, these principles should be operationalised through measurable indicators and mandatory transparency audits (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). Third, professional computing bodies like the BCS and IEEE should integrate such indicators into certification and accreditation standards.

However, stronger governance is not riskfree. Strict regulation could slow innovation, especially for smaller companies and developing countries that lack resources to meet complex compliance rules. It also centralises power in the hands of large governments or corporations that can afford to influence or adapt to new standards. As Veale and Zuiderveen Borgesius (2021) warn, overly rigid AI laws risk “locking in” dominant players by making compliance too costly for new entrants. Similarly, Ghosh (2023) notes that heavy-handed regulation may widen the technological gap between regions, disadvantaging emerging economies that are still building digital capacity. Therefore, excessive bureaucracy could discourage research or delay beneficial technologies.

Conclusion

Generative AI’s transformative potential makes global alignment in AI governance both urgent and feasible. As Correa et al. (2023) demonstrate, the world already shares a vocabulary of principles. Drawing from Deckard (2023), the Belmont and Menlo traditions, and the professional guidance of BCS (2024), this reflection argues for a shift from voluntary ethics to enforceable governance. Such alignment would not only protect human rights and public trust but also professionalise AI development, ensuring that computing professionals act within a coherent global ethical order. The alternative, self-regulation, risks undermining both the legitimacy of the field and the societies it serves. Still, this alignment should remain adaptable to different cultural values and technological contexts.

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