

# Making AI Ethics a Priority

Government oversight may be inevitable amid concern that AI can inadvertently replicate inherent social biases in automated decisions



Visitors explored the Hannover industry fair, which had an AI focus, in Germany earlier this month. PHOTO: JENS SCHLUETER/SHUTTERSTOCK

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Corporate users of artificial intelligence should start self-policing for AI bias before governments step up their efforts to regulate use of the technology, says Deloitte LLP Managing Director David Schatsky.

Deloitte released a report Wednesday that outlines steps organizations can take to make AI ethics a priority.

Among the suggested moves: create an ethics advisory committee and ethics policies, test and fix AI systems for bias, disclose how the company uses AI and customer data, and start preparing employees for job changes and job loss.

“To avoid unwanted regulation from being imposed on us, we need to demonstrate responsible use of this technology,” Mr. Schatsky said.

Some AI ethics experts say government oversight is inevitable amid mounting concern that artificial intelligence can inadvertently replicate inherent social biases in automated decisions.

Deloitte’s report—“Can artificial intelligence be ethical?”—documents an accelerating trend toward AI oversight. Already, more than two dozen national governments since 2017 have released plans to develop AI ethics or standards, the report says.

Among the ethical risks posed by AI, according to the report, are bias and discrimination in recruiting, credit scoring and judicial sentencing; a lack of transparency on how machines make decisions and how citizens’ private data is used; an erosion of privacy that comes from using private data without disclosure and consent; and a lack of accountability for who is responsible for mistaken or dangerous AI decisions.

Among the steps Deloitte recommends companies take

to make AI a priority:

- Create a dedicated AI governance and advisory committee to engage with stakeholders on identifying core values, and to oversee ethical AI design, development, deployment and use. Integrating ethics into AI requires learning the values held by customers, employees, regulators and the general public.
- Train developers to test and fix systems that encode bias and treat certain populations unfairly. Use antibias analytics tools that detect how data variables may be proxies for sensitive variables such as age, sex or race.
- Build public trust through transparency about the company's use of AI. Companies should disclose the use of AI systems that affect customers, explain what data they collect, how they use it, and how customers could be affected by that usage.
- Start advising employees on how AI may affect their jobs in the future. This could include retraining workers or giving them time to find new jobs.

AI ethics expert Manoj Saxena, the executive chairman of software company CognitiveScale Inc. and chairman of the nonprofit AI Global, said AI poses a new type of ethical challenge because it is a self-learning system that can process vast amounts of data to make decisions exceeding the capacity and understanding of humans.

“This is a whole new frontier of investment and regulations,” Mr. Saxena said.

Mr. Saxena and Deloitte’s Mr. Schatsky said that adopting AI ethics policies is going to be a formidable challenge that will require picking one definition of fairness among many, creating new functions within organizations, and taking other steps that Mr. Schatsky said will ultimately “change the way companies operate.”

“The conversation about ethics has gotten really loud,” Mr. Schatsky said. “More and more companies are going to choose to be systematic about how they account for the ethicalness of this technology because they won’t have any choice.”

Mr. Saxena, who taught an AI ethics course at the University of Texas at Austin, pointed to the mountains of customer data AI users hold, documenting people’s shopping, browsing, physical location and other data. He predicted that governments will have to step in to oversee AI and require big data users to grant consent to use personal information gleaned from customers and to disclose how it is used.