

Embedding Ethics in Research Practices

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Over the past decades, an increasing number of national and international policy statements and guidelines such as the Horizon 2020 funding programme of the European Commission directed the attention of researchers toward 'Responsible Research and Innovation' (RRI). This broad movement emphasises a number of key points such as ethical conduct; transparency; social utility; anticipating impacts and assessing alternatives; public outreach; critical reflection; and stakeholder collaboration. Nanoscience and nanotechnology research programs have been exemplar for developing a 'safe, integrated and responsible strategy' including the anticipation of potential impacts and the establishment of effective dialogue with all stakeholders. However the desire for more responsible research and innovation does effectively impact the daily practices of researchers? What is the impact of RRI policy? The study of the potential safety impacts of engineered nanomaterials for both human health and the environment has been included as a necessary component of nanotechnologies.

But how nanoscientists understand RRI and how does it affect their daily practices of research and development? While nanosafety research has become a central focus with toxicological and ecotoxicological studies, other aspects such as public outreach, collaboration with stakeholders upstream in research projects, and assessing alternatives are often perceived as too far from the actual conditions to become an integral part of competitive researcher.

I will argue that the divergence in the norms and values between what is being presented as RRI and what the key characteristics of good science can be reduced when scientists are able to look beyond their laboratories and institutions and confront the real world, its messiness, complexities and uncertainties. This cannot be achieved in the practices of individual research scientists without a range of institutional changes, such as more cultural diversity in research training and recruitment , supporting and facilitating interdisciplinary knowledge and competence in academic institutions and changing the evaluation criteria of what counts as good science.