

K3k workshop: Ethics for collaboration "between business and research ethics"

Gothenburg 18 October 2019



How should we understand ethics in collaboration? What approaches and tools do K3 projects generate to ensure ethical collaborations? What ethical guidelines are needed? In a previous workshop, the following issues were discussed:

- **With whom** can or should a higher education institution collaborate with;
- **How** collaboration should be organized and performed; and
- **How the results** of the collaboration can be and might be utilized.

A result of this earlier workshop was that ethical challenges in collaboration often land between business and research ethics, and that universities in Sweden have a great need for a common framework. In this workshop we will further explore the area between business and research ethics and their possible applications in collaboration. As an introduction to the workshop, we have invited two prominent researchers in the areas of business and research ethics to provide participants with tools to systematically discuss concrete ethical issues:

[Charles Ess](#), professor of practical philosophy from the University of Oslo, will give us an overview of how we can deal with ethical problems in research in collaboration.

[Joakim Sandberg](#), professor of practical philosophy from the University of Gothenburg, is an expert in the field of business ethics. He will address ethical issues in business-oriented collaboration.

Agenda

10:00-11:00 Presentations and questions

What is our ethical social role in the landscape of university collaborations with external actors?
Joakim Sandberg

How can collaboration with non-academics be the key to enable ethical research and education?
Charles Ess

11:00-12:30 Creating groups according to participants' ethical questions: Whom to collaborate with? How do we collaborate? What happens with the results?

13:30-15:00 Group work: Generating common ethical guidelines for university collaboration with external actors (with refreshments)

15:00-16:00 Feedback and advice from Charles Ess and Joakim Sandberg.

Notes from the group discussions: With whom can we collaborate?

- There are several stakeholders and organisations where it is possible to intuitively state that collaboration is problematic from an ethical perspective. There include – but are not necessarily limited to – authoritarian states, defense industry and certain political organisations. However, there are examples of ongoing collaboration with such actors and the ethical considerations are very contextual and case-based. Furthermore, even if we hypothetically pick an actor that would almost universally be categorized as an impossible collaboration partner from an ethical stand-point, such as an openly racist political organization, there is a lack of principles to base this decision on that would also be applicable to more ambiguous cases. For instance, the unethical features of such a partnership could be justified on ground of democratic legitimacy and basic human rights. But that becomes problematic when turning to cases that some would perceive to be ethical, such as collaboration with universities from authoritarian states.
 - In general, it would be desirable with some guidelines that provides some general principles, as well as various perspectives such as utilitarianism and deontologism and does not reduce considerations to arbitrariness.
- The question is however not just about the specific actors that it is possible to collaborate with, as ethical dilemmas can occur in collaboration with a variety of partners, where the dilemma does not really concern the partner itself, but rather the questions and situations that occur in the activity of collaboration. In general, there is a tendency that many ethical dilemmas surface when the issue becomes binary or “this-or-that”. At such a stage when the room for finding additional or middle-ground solutions diminish, ethical dilemmas becomes hard to solve.
 - In general, it is therefore important to seek to manage these risks at the earliest stage possible, to avoid having to deal with issues only when they become dichotomous.
- The law in current form gives quite limited guidance and has a utilitarian perspective. Currently, it simple states that universities should work towards results (in education and research) becoming utilized. The recent public inquiry on governance in the university sector suggested a slightly expanded formulation that explicates that the results should be connected to societal utility. However, the utilitarian perspective is still dominant in the formulation.
- It should also be highlighted that while ethical dilemmas are often highlighted in connection with research, the largest collaboration activity among universities in related to education. Some perhaps underexplored ethical dilemmas exist in relation to intern- and traineeships as well as external thesis projects, where students work or provide services to external organizations, without pay and where the external organization may not primarily be motivated by developing the competence of the student, but rather by the result of the student’s work. An additional dimension in these situations is that the university may have a limited ability to influence the practice, as the work by definition takes place outside of the university and is often mandatory either by rules or in practice.