

# Panel Dilemmas on Ethics, AI and Sustainable Digital Transition: A DeSK Italy–Argentina Perspective

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## Abstract

This short paper synthesizes the discussion sparked by five guiding questions posed at the DeSK High Level Training School (Italy-Argentina cooperation) on ethics, AI and sustainable digital futures. The questions are used as an analytic scaffold to surface recurrent dilemmas in institutional deployments: (i) autonomy vs. meaningful human control; (ii) efficiency vs. fairness and legitimacy in public and educational decisions; (iii) cyber-resilience vs. privacy and concentration of power; (iv) innovation vs. energy/CO<sub>2</sub>e and lifecycle costs; and (v) universal principles vs. locally grounded legal and cultural realities. Across these dilemmas, we argue that ethics becomes actionable only when translated into accountable practice: clear role allocation, contestability and redress, impact assessment before deployment, privacy-by-design, security assurance, and measurable sustainability objectives. We conclude with a cooperation-oriented agenda for DeSK: shared teaching modules, a binational case repository, reusable procurement and governance clauses, and joint pilots that produce publishable evidence on what works in real university and public-sector settings.

Keywords: Responsible AI; Panel dilemmas; Human oversight; Algorithmic impact assessment; Privacy-by-design; Sustainable computing

## 1. Introduction

Digital transformation is accelerating across universities and public services, often through AI-enabled systems that reshape how decisions are made, services are delivered, and resources are allocated. In practice, ethical controversies rarely emerge from abstract principles alone; they emerge from concrete trade-offs under institutional constraints (time, budgets, vendors, data availability, and legacy infrastructures).

The DeSK panel framed this reality through five questions that are both practical and normative: (1) How far should AI autonomy go, and where must human judgment remain essential? (2) Which safeguards are needed when AI affects public, educational or institutional decisions, so that bias and inequality are not reinforced? (3) How can we balance cybersecurity, resilience, privacy and transparency without legitimizing surveillance or concentration of power? (4) How should we ethically assess technologies that increase energy use and environmental costs? (5) In international cooperation, which principles should be universal, and which must be adapted to local legal and social realities? The closing prompt—“one non-negotiable principle”—forces prioritization and reveals what each community is unwilling to sacrifice.

## 2. Objectives and Scope

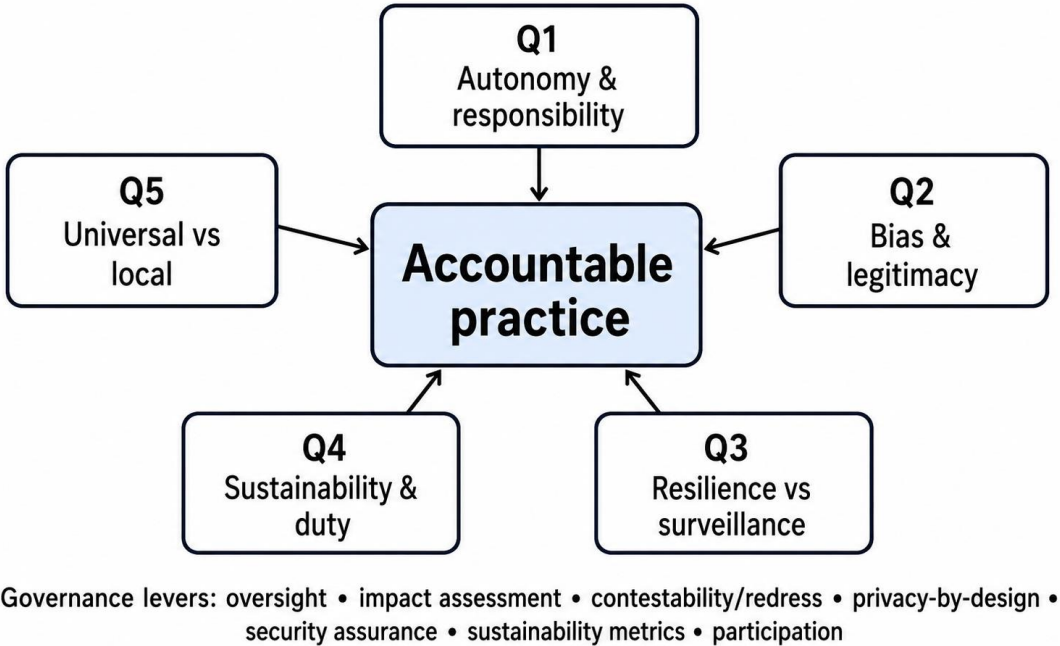
This contribution uses the panel questions as a structured lens to (i) make the underlying dilemmas explicit, (ii) connect them to operational governance mechanisms that universities and public institutions can actually implement, and (iii) outline a concrete agenda for a future Italy–Argentina joint project within DeSK: shared teaching materials, a cross-case repository, and pilots that generate publishable evidence on responsible and sustainable AI.

## 3. Methodology / Approach

We use a question-driven synthesis in three steps. First, we treat the five panel questions as categories of risk and responsibility and map them to governance levers across the lifecycle (design, procurement, deployment, monitoring). Second, we align this mapping with widely used normative and policy references (human oversight, risk management, privacy-by-design, security assurance, and sustainability metrics), focusing on what can be evidenced and audited in institutional settings. Third, we translate the discussion into candidate work packages for transnational cooperation (education, evaluation, and pilots).

**4. Results, Discussion and Implications**

Rather than treating the panel as a list of topics, we treat it as a structured set of dilemmas. Figure 1 summarizes the five guiding questions as an analytic scaffold that connects ethical concerns to concrete governance levers in institutional deployments.



*Figure 1. Panel questions as an analytic scaffold: from dilemmas to governance levers (created by the author).*

Below, each question is restated as a dilemma and linked to implementation implications that can be operationalized in university and public-sector settings.

**Q1—Autonomy vs. responsibility.** Panelists converged on a boundary condition: autonomy may scale, but responsibility cannot be delegated. The dilemma is not ‘human-in-the-loop vs. automation’ but ‘meaningful human control’: clear role allocation (provider/deployer/operator/decision-maker), intervention points (override, pause, kill-switch), and anti-automation-bias training. In high-stakes contexts, contestability (human review, appeal) is part of oversight.

**Q2—Bias, legitimacy and public decision-making.** When AI is used in public, educational or institutional decisions, legitimacy depends on fairness in context. A central dilemma is that ‘fairness’ has multiple definitions and may conflict with efficiency or accuracy. Ethical safeguards therefore include: impact assessment before deployment; subgroup performance reporting; documentation of data provenance; accessibility requirements; and complaint/redress channels that work in practice.

**Q3—Cyber-resilience without surveillance.** Participants stressed that resilience initiatives can quietly expand surveillance or concentrate power (through centralized logging, identity systems, or vendor lock-in). The dilemma is to obtain traceability and incident response capability without normalizing indiscriminate monitoring. Privacy-by-design (minimization, purpose limitation, retention/deletion) and security-by-design (encryption, access control, secure SDLC) should be paired with purpose-bound logging and, where appropriate, pseudonymization.

**Q4—Sustainability and intergenerational responsibility.** The debate treated sustainability as a first-class requirement, not an ‘extra’. The dilemma is that AI may increase efficiency in one domain while shifting costs to energy use, hardware lifecycles, or environmental externalities. A minimal ethical stance is to measure and report energy/CO2e where feasible, optimize models and infrastructure (right-sizing, batching, quantization), and govern trade-offs jointly (performance, inclusion, cost, environmental impact).

**Q5—Universal principles vs. local realities.** Cooperation benefits from shared principles, but implementation must respect local legal frameworks, languages, and harm definitions. The dilemma is to avoid both ‘ethical relativism’ (anything goes locally) and ‘ethical imperialism’ (one-size-fits-all). A practical middle ground is a common vocabulary (e.g., transparency, inclusion, accountability, security & privacy) plus localized assessment protocols, multilingual evaluation, and stakeholder participation.

Closing—non-negotiables and a project agenda. Across positions, non-negotiables clustered around three ideas: human responsibility for consequential decisions; rights-oriented safeguards (privacy, non-discrimination, contestability); and sustainability as a constraint. We propose a DeSK follow-up project that produces reusable outputs: (i) mirror teaching modules (Spanish/Italian/English) with shared case studies; (ii) a binational case repository; (iii) a set of procurement clauses for auditability, accessibility and data governance; and (iv) pilots in university or public-sector services with publishable evaluation results.

Panel question	Core dilemma	Proposed DeSK joint output (Italy–Argentina)
Q1 AI autonomy & human judgment	Meaningful control vs. efficiency/automation	Oversight patterns + training material to reduce automation bias
Q2 Bias & public decisions	Fairness definitions vs. institutional legitimacy	Shared AIA template + subgroup reporting guidance + redress patterns
Q3 Privacy, cybersecurity & power	Resilience vs. surveillance/centralization	Privacy-by-design + security assurance checklist for deployments/procurement
Q4 Sustainability & responsibility	Innovation vs. energy/CO2e and lifecycle costs	Sustainability metrics guidance + ‘green requirements’ for AI projects
Q5 Shared vs. local principles	Universal values vs. local law/culture/language	Multilingual assessment protocol + shared case repository

*Table 1. Panel questions, dilemmas, and a cooperation-oriented output mapping (created by the author).*

## 5. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The DeSK panel questions function as a practical ethics compass: they surface trade-offs that technical teams and institutions must make explicit. Treating these questions as a governance checklist of dilemmas helps translate values into accountable practice, while preserving room for local context.

Future work should focus on producing shared evidence rather than only shared principles: comparative pilots, common datasets for evaluation where appropriate, and joint publications documenting what works (and what fails) when implementing responsible and sustainable AI in real institutions.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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