From Principles to Practice: Why Institutions Need Ethical AI Policies

Join the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS), the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

Background

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming part of institutional life across research, education, healthcare, and public service. While ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, and human agency are widely recognised, they remain aspirational without institutional policies to make them meaningful in practice.

This talk explores why institutions from universities and hospitals to government bodies and research organisations need AI policies grounded in ethical principles to guide responsible use, protect research integrity, clarify accountability, safeguard privacy, and preserve human agency in decision-making. It argues that policy should not be viewed as a constraint on innovation, but as an enabling framework for credible, inclusive, and responsible AI adoption and that the question is no longer whether institutions should have AI policies, but whether they can afford not to.

Date:
Tuesday, 16 July 2026

Time:
13:00 – 14:30 (SAST)

RSVP:
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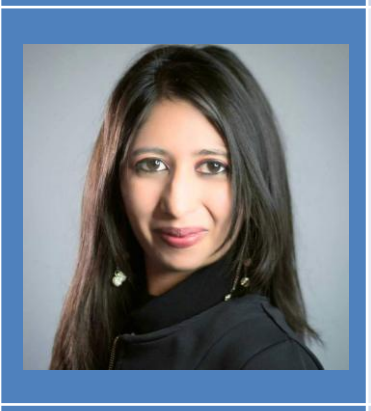
Objectives:

- *To explain how AI policies can translate principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy and human agency into practical institutional guidance.*
- *To demonstrate why responsible AI use requires clear policies that protect research integrity, clarify responsibility, safeguard data and privacy, and support informed human decision-making.*
- *To challenge the view that policy restricts innovation, and instead present policy as an enabling framework for credible, inclusive and responsible AI adoption.*

Speakers

Dr Sampath Jayalath is a Senior Lecturer in Electrical Engineering at the University of Cape Town. He is an IEEE CertifAIEd™ Authorized Assessor, a credential that recognises his capacity to evaluate AI systems against ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, and human agency. He has experience assessing AI ethics in both academic and industry contexts, with a focus on translating ethical principles into practical governance and responsible innovation. His talk explores why institutions need AI policies grounded in ethical principles to guide responsible AI adoption, strengthen trust, and turn values into practice.



Dr Yaseera Ismail is Head of the QuPhotonics Laboratory in the Department of Physics at Stellenbosch University, where she leads research on quantum optical technologies for secure long-distance quantum communication. An experimental physicist, she has received numerous national and international honours, including the TechWomen Emerging Leader Award (2016), appointment as an Optica Ambassador (2018), and inauguration into the South African Young Academy of Science (2024). She serves as Optica-appointed Vice President of the International Commission for Optics, is an Editorial Board member of Scientific Reports, and was named among the Quantum 100 in 2025, a UNESCO-supported initiative recognising global leaders in quantum science.

Dr Ekaterina Rzyankina is a lecturer in Electrical Engineering and a researcher at the Centre for Research in Engineering Education (CREE), University of Cape Town, in Cape Town, South Africa. Her work sits at the intersection of engineering education, digital technology and Artificial Intelligence, focusing on how generative AI, e-textbooks and analytics tools reshape learning, feedback and postgraduate supervision.

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