

# IDEESE Module 1.1

## Workplace Ethics in Transnational Contexts

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### Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

1. Explain why scientists and engineers need to pay attention to the international context of their work
2. Specify what additional considerations arise and what steps must be taken in transnational discussions of ethics in science and engineering fields

### Outline for In-class Discussion

#### I. The contemporary setting of scientific and technical work

- A. Pose question: We often speak of living in a “globalized” world, which is a way of saying that there is now more interconnection among countries and their societies. What are the sources of this interconnection?

Students should be able to identify these. Ask for examples of each.

1. Increased volume and value of cross-border economic transactions
2. More rapid flow of information, ideas, and news
3. Increased travel and cross-border migration

- B. Greater frequency and intensity of cross-border communication and collaboration among scientists and engineers

Ask students for examples

- C. Greater concern in all countries about the wider social implications of the results of scientific research and engineering projects.

Ask students for examples

## II. Bringing ethics to bear on transnational activity

### A. Three possible responses

1. Apply ethics of own society to all activities of its members wherever the activity occurs
2. Apply ethics prevailing in the society where activity occurs no matter who does it.
3. Develop ethical principles and rules common to all societies where the scientific or engineering work occurs.

Ask students to give examples of situations in which each choice was made, then about why they think that choice was made.

### B. Differences between national and transnational ethical debate

## Suggested Case Studies

“Bhopal Plant Disaster – Situation Summary” International Dimensions of Ethics Education in Science and Engineering Case Study Series. Developed March 2008.

This case includes 7 appendices. Appendices A and D are most relevant for a discussion of workplace ethics in transnational contexts.

“Scientific Fraud in Stem Cell Research” International Dimensions of Ethics Education in Science and Engineering Case Study Series. To be developed.

## Notes for Instructor

The three possible responses to bringing ethics to bear parallel the choices facing all forms of cross-border activity. They have been debated most extensively in matters related to activities of multinational corporations, a topic of Module 1.2, and are also reflected in international law defining states' legal authority (jurisdiction) over the activities of private individuals, companies, and organizations.

International Law rules on states' jurisdiction in criminal and civil matters indicate the following priorities among claims to jurisdiction: 1) territorial – the state where the activity occurs deals with any legal controversy arising from it, 2) nationality – the state where the person who undertakes an activity creating legal controversy is a citizen or permanent resident takes care of it, 3) private individuals and groups agree in contracts among themselves which state's law will apply in the event of a legal dispute. In criminal law choices 1 and 2 are an order of priority; in civil law choices 1 and 2 can be regarded as “default settings” operating in that order (if the state suggested by 1 does not act, the state suggested by 2 can step in) with choice 3 as an “override” that individuals, firms, or organizations can adopt in certain areas of activity, mainly economic transactions.

Ethicists often prefer a similar arrangement, recommending application of the ethics of the society where the activity occurs. When activity involves members of different societies whose ethical standards vary significantly, some ethicists prefer applying whichever ethical standards impose greater obligations to consider and respect the needs and interests of others.

Contemporary ethicists are very careful to make clear that they are not suggesting one society's ethical systems is generally superior to the ethical systems of the other society or societies. In the past notions of cultural superiority were used to justify conquest and imperialism. European and North American examples of this practice are very well known because those are the areas of the world where the countries with the greatest ability to expand were located between 1500 and 1945; but feelings of cultural superiority have existed elsewhere as well. The search for ethical commonalities across cultures and the various efforts to develop new transnational ethical codes are efforts to address the tensions of increased interaction by people of different cultures without resorting to conquest and imperialism.

The extent of continuing sensitivity about the links between spread of cultural influences, claims of cultural superiority, and efforts to impose political domination can be seen in contemporary debates about what critics of western cultural influences around the world call "cultural imperialism." "Cultural imperialism" does not involve direct rule by the elite of one society over another; it is applied to situations in which activities in one society are judged the ethical standards of another society. Charges of cultural imperialism are most likely to occur when the external standards appear unconnected to and inappropriate for the life of the society being judged. They can be hard to evaluate, particularly from outside, since cultures are not static and every society experiences tensions between elites and others in which what the elite wants to call cultural tradition is an interpretation that buttresses elite advantages while others invoke other traditions of the culture to sustain their claims to greater respect, dignity, and participation in decision-making.

## **Resources Included with this Module**

Organizational Diagrams of selected Scientific Organizations

- International Council of Scientific Unions
- Typical National Academy of Sciences
- Relations among UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) , International Congress of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and Scientific Committee on Oceanographic Research (SCOR)
- Relations among International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Committee on Space Research (COSPAR), and IUCAF
- US National Academy of Sciences and National Research Council

## **Recommended Readings**

Instructors new to ethics topics might find helpful the entries in Donald M. Borchert, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Detroit: Thompson-Gale, 2006) on "Ethics" (v.3 pp. 379-393); "Ethics and Morality" (v.3 pp. 450-451); "Equality, Moral and Social" (v. 3, pp. 329-332); "Equality, Moral and Social [Addendum]" (v.3 pp. 334-336) and "Feminist Ethics" (v. 3 pp. 578-581).

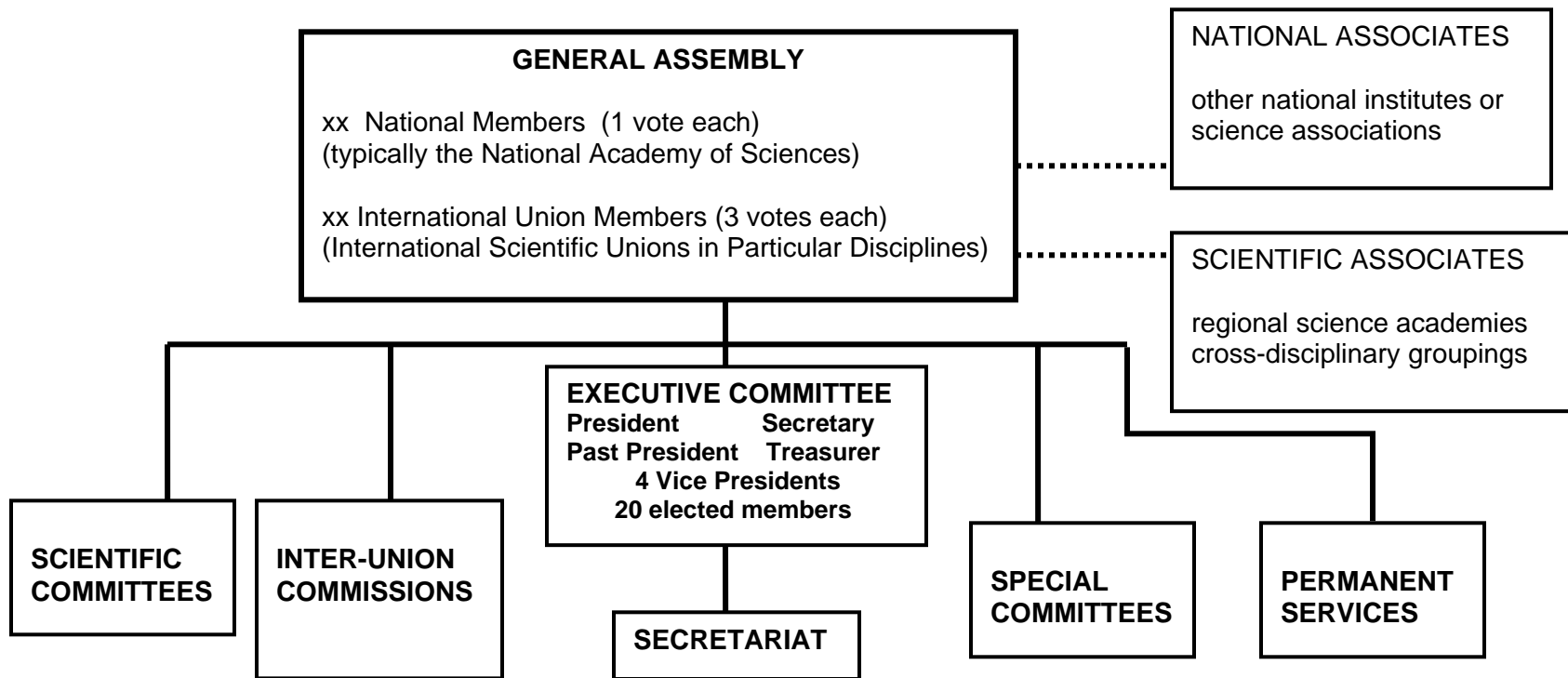
# IDEESE Module 1.1: Diagrams of Scientific Organizations

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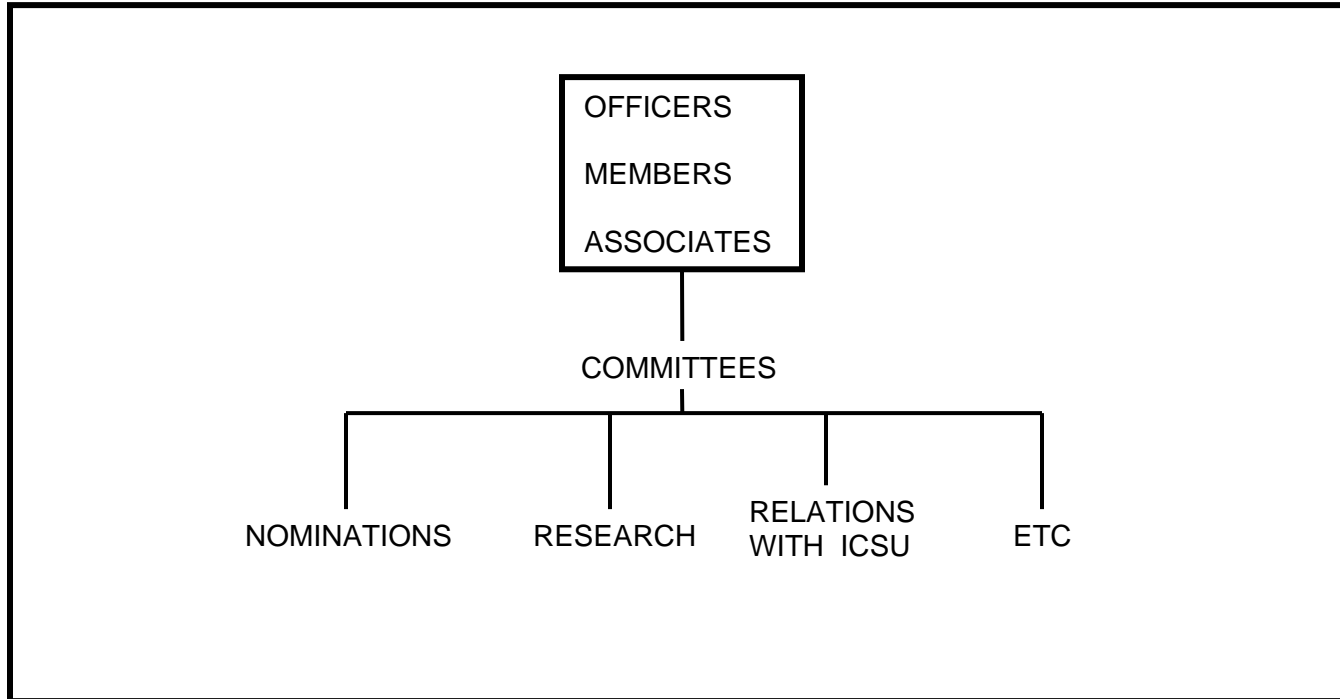
This section includes Organizational Diagrams of:

- International Council of Scientific Unions
- Typical National Academy of Sciences
- Relations among UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) , International Congress of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and Scientific Committee on Oceanographic Research (SCOR)
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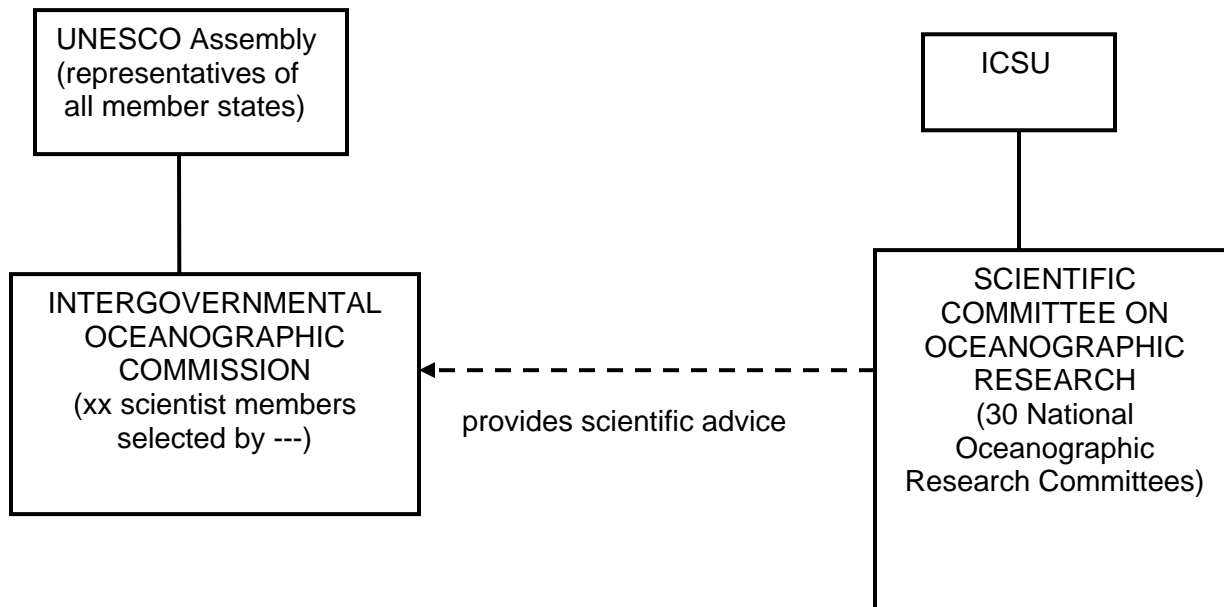
# International Council of Scientific Unions



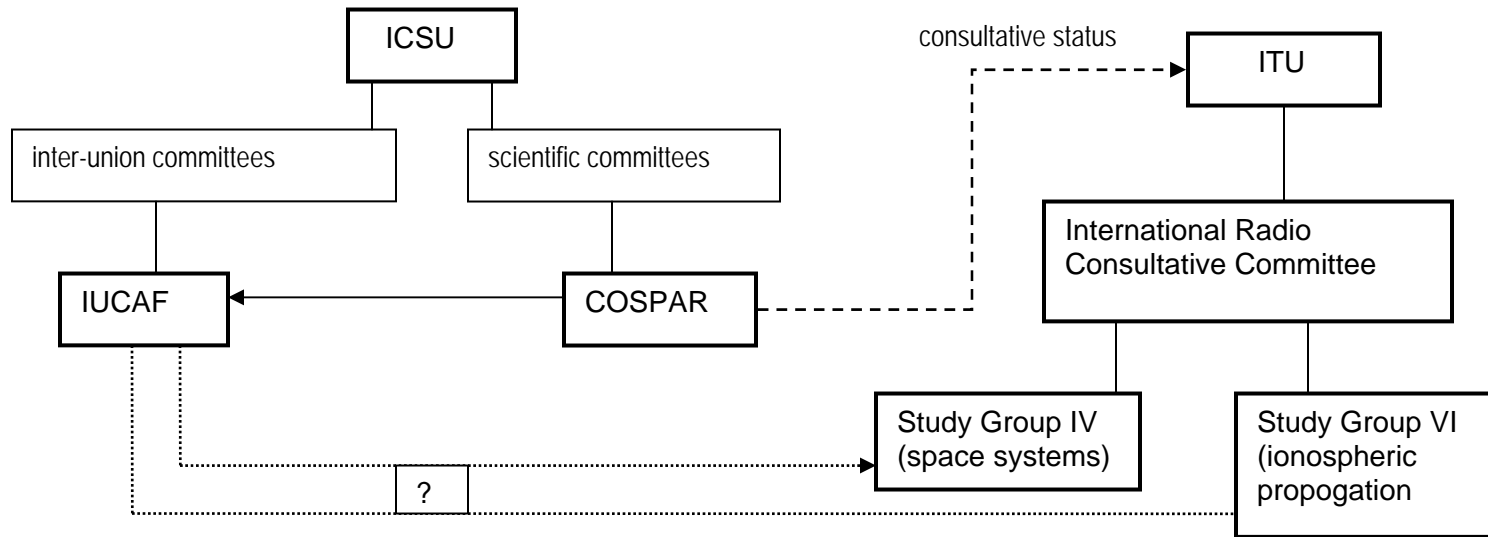
Typical National Academy of Sciences



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# ITU, COSPAR, and IUCAF





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