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Abstract

What is it that really makes communicating science a good, moral thing to do? And are there limits to the potential 'goodness' of science communication? In this article, we argue it is time we consider what an ethics of science communication might look like. Not only will this help us figure out what doing the right, moral thing might be, it also invites us to think through one of the most perplexing, challenging and pressing questions for this still emerging field: what are the core unifying features of science communication?

Keywords

Professionalism, professional development and training in science communication, Science communication: Theory and models

Communicating science, we are often told, is an important thing to do. The public should be informed so it can make better decisions, the argument states.

More knowledge is better than less knowledge, right? Oh, as the adage has it, we need 'knowledge for knowledge's sake'. All this gives science communication a sense of moral righteousness: science communication is a good moral thing to do. But let's pause here.

What is it that really makes communicating science a good, moral thing to do? And are there limits to the potential 'goodness' of science communication? Surely not all science is unambiguously good (think biological weapons, for example). It would be strange to think that communicating the 'how-to' details for building a biological weapon is as ethically professionally as communicating the 'how-to' details for building a weather station. So let us take step back and think about this: where does science communication's draw its moral grounding from? Is science communication a child of science, a child of journalism, a child of communication, or is it time it enters adulthood when it comes to its ethics.

As it turns out, working out the ethics of science communication does more than just help us figure out what doing the right, moral thing might be. It invites us to think through one of the most perplexing, challenging and pressing questions for this emerging field: what are the core unifying features of science communication? And it is high time we tackle both the question of what the ethics of science communication are, and the question of what is the core of science communication.