

Tuesday late afternoon session Track C, Tuesday, Sep 23 2025, 16:00-17:45

Location: Seminar 5

Session: **Handling cases**

Chair: Marten Juurik

OR-41

Beyond approval: experiences and lessons from constructing research ethics review

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Since 2020 the TU Wien has piloted and then formalized research ethics review in response to the growing need for researchers to obtain research ethics review for their research. Currently the TU Wien Research Ethics Committee (TUW REC) focuses on human research participation in minimal risk, non-invasive research activities involving healthy volunteers. The study authors that approach the committee include engineers and researchers recruiting participants for interviews studies, workshops, observations and prototype trials.

This presentation will introduce the consultative and dialogue-based approach to research ethics review, its background, and some of the benefits and challenges from the perspective of the ethics committee reviewers and researchers who have participated in the review process. In addition, some observations on individual competence and institutional capacity building and lessons learned will be provided.

The primarily consultative focus of the university's research ethics committee grew out of necessity and opportunity. With little institutional experience in formal research ethics, the reviewers themselves had to be trained for the task before the committee could be established. Strengthening the research ethics responsibilities of researchers was considered important in the design of the review process, as members of the research community as a whole were relatively unfamiliar with the research ethics requirements for human research participation. In addition, the awareness-raising and educational effects of the committee were considered important. The lack of prior research ethics review structures, or even a legal requirement to establish such structures in the Austrian context, provided an opportunity for methodological experimentation almost starting from scratch.

The review process was designed to avoid the misconception that the committee is absolving researchers of responsibility or merely serving as a rubber stamp for approval. In addition, the idea that all ethical issues could be identified and addressed at the outset of research was challenged in the design. Finally, care was taken to minimize any negative connotations associated with ethics review. In this way, the committee has sought to be accessible, attentive, and sympathetic, thereby promoting researchers' responsibility and contributing to an open and safe research environment. The committee's commitment to a supportive attitude is conveyed by its slogan, "Caring rather than clearing."

The pilot process resulted in a review method that enables direct engagement with ethical concerns in researchers' work, strengthens researchers' responsibilities to their research participants, and focuses on improving research by facilitating the integration of research ethics by design.