

We Just Build Hammers

We Just Build Hammers Collective Notebook

Code of Conduct

- <https://m.otherboard.org/governance/code-of-conduct/>

Introductions

Name

Geography

Affiliation/interest in responsible tech

One question or detail on your mind from reading part III. What did you notice? What one thing stood out?

Group Discussion: Part III May 14

Group Discussion: Part II April 30

Agenda

- Welcome - a link to this document! (5 minutes)

- Introductions (15 minutes)
- [\(M\)otherboard overview](#) (5 minutes)
- Reading from Coraline (5 minutes)
- Conversation + Questions (45 minutes)
- Close + Next Steps (15 minutes)

Group Discussion: Part I April 14

Compartmentalization of Manhattan Project (100K workers, 100 knew atomic, ~12 knew bomb) mirrored today in the hyper-specialization of people on tech projects (front-end, operations, etc.).

Group Exercise #1: Have you experienced situations where ethical decisions were delegated upward in your organization? How did you respond to maintain your own ethical agency? What are some ethical boundaries you've set for yourself?

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- Certainly. Through being a young person taking jobs where you can with retail and student life alike, the bigger factions organized behind my labor are often ones contributing to hate. While I can't say I was able as an individual to be in a position where I could simply stop working, I can say that being active in my communities, using my voice to express my beliefs is how I make sure to maintain my own ethical agency. –Isabella
 - Short answer: no, I have no personal experience in this yet.
 - Yes. I was at a company where we had a reporting mechanism that obligated them to discuss the issue publicly, but yet the decision was still made by higher ups with no real transparency. I responded with labor organizing - this pushed me towards the union.
 - Somewhat tangential questions for Coraline/the group:
 - Should a scientist publicise their invention of a highly dangerous “tool”? E.g. in Nick Bostrom’s “easy nukes” thought experiment, in which, let’s say, someone discovers a way to make nuclear bombs from ingredients you could buy at a supermarket.
 - Ethical boundaries: not choosing a career that would imprison me further in ‘samsara’, or vain striving (personally, a Buddhist) HT
 - Earlier in my career, I knew that a coworker was being harassed but did not take the chance to say anything about it. The assumption was that her manager would get the feedback and stop the activity. He didn’t. She eventually spoke up on her own, risking her own position. I promised – and have – always used whatever power I have to speak up for others even if on other teams. (VPT)

- MZ: Most of my ethical quandaries are around how conflict and power are handled. If there aren't clear processes it's like a domino effect of harm. Now my boundary is ensuring conflict processes exist as foundational to the projects I work on.
- Learning that HR in Morgan Stanley technology division was not to be trusted with the issues that were raised, and trying to navigate that reality when I was subject to what I felt was sexual harassment from a senior or more politically connected colleague
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Negative roadmap: features you'll never build

KLG

- I love the negative roadmapping; and for me, it was understanding a strong self of personal values - something I'd argue many of us forgo early in our career, because it's not touted as a place to start
 - Selling something I didn't believe in and/or see a future for our company (and therefore employees); left the organization because of a deep misalignment in belief and ethics - not everyone has this privilege
 - A power dynamic is established early on that employers/companies hold power, and individuals must establish credibility in order to have a voice
 - What happens if we shift that?
- Something as simple as the code of conduct created here at the beginning of this meeting; it goes beyond a jargony employee handbook, and is instead rooted in ethics and being overt in that; how do we put values/ethics into action?
- "There is no calvary..." a realization with greater experience, access & power that this isn't the 'way it's always been...' it's actually the way it was designed; just like anything we have a choice but have to be willing to participate; and that's hard.

EB:

- I have run my organization for a long time and if anything have learned that I want ethical decisionmaking to fall in everyone purview, and for everyone to be able to articulate trade offs clearly when ethics are part of the conversation
- With our clients in the HR space, we have encountered companies that do not subscribe to our ethical standards and we have fired them (it was so satisfying TBH but it cost us a heap of needed revenue)
- I would say I have had to widen my ethical boundaries as I have become more aware of my own participation in unethical systems (capitalism, tech etc); now I feel like it's unethical for ppl with privilege not to be speaking up in this moment and doing all that we can to affect positive change
- I accidentally created a whisper network that fanned the flames of metoo in a major way and I saw the importance of building power in community

JPW: I work in academia; showing up, positionality, vulnerability, raw, awkward, presence, truth to power, taking and making space, lifting people every chance, creativity as core value

I discovered from talking to the whisper network of women within a company that there were “made men” who could do no wrong, and even had been complained about in the past. I decided I could not work for a company that didn’t hold senior leadership accountable. - SMW

Group Exercise #2: If you were to write your own version of Szilard's "Ten Commandments" for this book club what would be your first three principles? Let’s write them all out individually and see what patterns emerge first to establish a shared language for our Book Club.

- Do the work; come prepared and be a participatory member
- Have a way to facilitate (moderate) participation from everyone

WRAP UP

Feedback / Reflection

What are you taking with you from this conversation?

- I have a real curiosity about the 100,000 people who “didn’t know what they were building.” Do you think they had a suspicion? I’ve been one of the “100K” group in a company, and we did suspect various evils that came to light later. Any stories exist about this group building the bomb?
- Showing up - even without much to add or prepared - is enough. Being in community, and trusting that whatever is meant to come out of it will. If you do that enough, you’ll “know what to do”

Suggestions for format, discussion structure, prompts?

- The only feedback I have is to ask whether it’s possible to move the time slightly earlier (I am in London, and it’s getting to 2:30am) - no expectation at all!!
- Share a few prompts beforehand? +2
- Tables for responses on the doc? I love clear lines. It’s a me thing.