

ADAPT

Moonshot Ethics Audit

February 2024

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About Moonshot

Moonshot is a global social impact business working to end online harms, applying evidence, ethics and human rights. Moonshot was founded to develop custom technology to analyse extremist content online, including content related to violent extremism, gender-based violence, disinformation, and serious organised crime. The team delivers programs in over 30 countries to reduce violence and reach people engaging in or affected by online harms.

Scope and Goals

The process undertaken by Adapt was to review Moonshot's internal approach to ethics in terms of project delivery (selection, management, and development), recruitment, training, and business development. Particular attention was given to how staff operated the comprehensive ethical policies and any constraints or problems they experienced in the process.

The overarching goals of the interviews were to understand:

- How staff apply ethical processes to their day-to-day work
- Staff perceptions of Moonshot's ethical policy
- The impact of ethics on project work and any ethical dilemmas encountered
- Moonshot's approach to ethical business development
- Whether staff draw upon the organisation's resources in assessing ethical issues
- The role of the ethics committee
- Organisational culture and leadership on ethics
- If Moonshot's approach to ethics has changed, how and why or why not
- How the recent growth of the company's staff has impacted ethics

Key Findings

As in previous audits, we have found that Moonshot's ethical processes are an integral facet of daily operations and that the ethical standard to which Moonshot holds itself is admirably high. As the staff has doubled in size, much of this report focuses on how the ethical standards at Moonshot have been impacted by the company's vigorous growth over the last year. We were delighted to see that there are no immediate concerns which threaten Moonshot's capability to deliver ethical work. While there are undoubtedly challenges—as is expected given the industry and scope of work Moonshot engages in—we believe the numerous positive aspects of the organisation will allow Moonshot to address them.

Throughout our interviews, we noted how “baked-in” ethics was to the organisation, and the lengths taken to ensure that ethical considerations were addressed across issue areas. For example, among the documents we reviewed, we saw “ethical annexes”—documents which encourage additional reflections on issues that may be particularly challenging. Staff also voiced that they use the range of documentation frequently in their work, and feel comfortable raising concerns to their team members, regardless of seniority. There is little doubt that Moonshot staff feel comfortable drafting ethics frameworks and detailing any challenges they foresee. In some form, every interviewee commented on the high calibre of the documentation provided. They said it is accessible, comprehensive, impressive, and useful. Beyond the employment of these documents, all interviewed team members stated their firm belief that ethics is at the forefront of the company's projects and identity. We were additionally impressed with how the ethical policies of Moonshot commit staff to impartial decision-making and guide them through ethical dilemmas as they arise. Reviewing much of this ethical work is the ethics committee. The committee was praised by team members, many of whom remarked positively on its role, its structure, and its openness. The work, policies, and committee are all supported by Moonshot's culture of ethics and leadership. We saw several examples of ethics processes finding problems that resulted in workstreams not being pursued and implementation methods being altered.

This wealth of evidence supports our conclusion that Moonshot strives to create and operationalise ethical work. Still, as the scope and the areas in which the company operates continue to grow, new challenges will continue to arise. The most pressing among these obstacles is ensuring an ethical approach to business development, proper knowledge management, impactful employee induction, and company cohesion. Specifically, we heard from staff that training could usefully be reviewed and kept up to date, that multiple versions of the same guiding ethical documents exist on the company cloud, that time pressures preclude more extensive moral analysis which some projects may require, and that the varying cultures in which the company operates make ethics more difficult to standardise. We do not believe these challenges will pose a substantial risk to Moonshot's commitment to ethics, but they are challenges which could be exacerbated by sustained growth.

To reiterate, we believe that Moonshot's commitment to ethics is a clear and vital strength of the organisation. We highlight these challenges to acknowledge relatively minor issues that Moonshot could improve upon to better fulfil its mission. Overall, across all interviews and documentation reviewed, there was a clear dedication to ethics.

Conclusions

Throughout this process, we have been consistently impressed with the calibre of the staff, the projects they deliver, and the documents we have reviewed. Ethics is undoubtedly central to the organisation—all the way from project management down to recruitment. Since our last audit, there have been considerable changes. Changes in size, in scope, and in delivery. What had once been more informal, cultural approaches have been supplanted by systematised, formal proceedings to ensure the necessary processes are followed on all levels.

As Moonshot expands to counter more difficult challenges, let this audit stand as a testament, not to the work that must be done, but to the incredible strides Moonshot has taken to ensure ethics is integral to their work. This intentional focus separates the company from its competitors, and, as indicated by the wealth of evidence we have analysed, this focus does not appear threatened. Nonetheless, Moonshot's ability to take on more complex challenges in increasingly diverse regions will hinge upon how it addresses the identified obstacles.

About Adapt

Adapt helps tech companies engage key stakeholders to build trust & safety and advance human rights.

We are a team of tech policy and human rights experts with deep experience working with governments, civil society and international organisations across the globe. As Adapt, we bring a unique and detailed understanding of key digital issues to help companies of all sizes develop their policies, their messaging and their external engagement in order to meet company objectives.

Our approach begins by understanding an organisation's support needs, priorities and timelines before offering a tailored support plan. We offer a range of services to our clients in collaboration with our global network of expert partners, including stakeholder engagement, trust and safety, and human rights policy and due diligence.

The Founders

Charles Bradley -- A leading business management and digital policy practitioner who has worked globally with tech companies and governments.

Andrew Puddephatt OBE -- An international expert on data protection, transparency and human rights. An advisor to UNESCO and several major foundations, Andrew has an OBE for services to human rights.

