ADAPT

Moonshot Ethics Audit

2022

About Moonshot

Moonshot is a global social impact business working to end online harms, applying evidence, ethics, and human rights. Moonshot develops new tech and methodologies to expose threats, disrupt malicious actors and protect vulnerable audiences online. Working to end online harms means making communities, governments, and businesses safer, both online and off, around the world.

Scope and goals

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

Adapt reviewed Moonshot's internal ethics policy and practice documents and several project-specific examples, before interviewing staff of a range of levels from different offices.

The overarching goals of the document analysis and interviews were to understand:
- Comprehensiveness versus practicality of ethics policy and practices
- Use of ethical processes in day-to-day work
- Challenge of meeting ethical commitments amid rapid growth and strained capacity
- Project ethical dilemmas encountered
- Ethics in business development
- Emphasis on ethics during induction of new staff
- Organisational culture and leadership on ethics

Key findings

Adapt reviewed a range of internal policy documents and interviewed key staff to assess Moonshot's approach to ethics. As in past audits, we find that Moonshot's ethical processes and policies are of a high standard, with a balance struck between pragmatism and comprehensiveness (especially since its revision in 2022), so they can effectively mitigate ethical issues in project development and implementation. While it is not possible to be tailored for every project, especially those as diverse as Moonshot's, staff felt the framework is flexible enough to cover the bases for almost every project. Staff also found the ethics processes accessible and often return to them during the course of their day-to-day work. There is still room for improvement. An idea raised to potentially expand ethics processes to cover issues faced by the tech team and for more cross-team ethics discussions.

These formal policies are supported by Moonshot's culture of ethics and leadership. We were presented with several examples of ethics processes finding problems that resulted in business development not being pursued and implementation methods being altered. Moonshot's ethics processes are made clear to new joiners early in induction, and constantly referred to during day-to-day work. We noted some appetite for more internal discussions to air ethical considerations, such as in the format of brown bag lunches. Overall, we found a significant commitment to ethics in every member we spoke to.

The key ethical challenge facing Moonshot's policy commitments arises from rapid changes in its size and personnel, and the pressure this places on staff and their ability to properly complete and apply ethical processes. The growth in quantity, scope, and geography of projects requires more and more

specialised resources, especially to be able to fully consider potential ethical risks. Some interviewed staff felt less able to give ethical concerns the attention they deserve, both in the business development and implementation phases, due to the strains of project delivery hindered by capacity constraints, tight deadlines, and feeling of lacking the required depth of subject matter or geographic expertise. In addition, staff shared the view that certain business development decisions, especially in relation to projects in new subject areas, are not made with the transparency they had come to expect of Moonshot decision-making.

Conclusion

As it has flourished over the past few years, Moonshot has succeeded in integrating its informal, cultural commitment to ethics with a larger staff backed by formal ethical policy and processes. But as it continues to grow, the challenge of ensuring these policies and processes are properly adhered will be harder. Through discussions with staff, the potential solutions are to streamline business development to refocus on Moonshot's core mission of countering online harms or to increase both permanent and short-term staff capacity. Whatever leadership decides, there should be greater transparency with staff about the thinking behind the chosen direction to maintain levels of trust in the organisation.

About Adapt

Adapt works with data-driven companies to re-frame their relationship with data - helping them realise their strategic objectives through a more responsible and ethical approach.

We are a team of data policy, security and human rights experts with deep experience working alongside governments, private donors and tech companies of all shapes and sizes across the globe. As Adapt, we bring a unique and detailed understanding of ethics within the digital sphere, and practical proficiency applying those values to start-ups, high-growth, and established businesses.

Our approach focuses on creating value. We build partnerships with our clients and champion their growth into responsible and ethical companies of the future.

We take a holistic view of data responsibility, positioning it in the context of a company's entire digital ecosystem. We work to identify gaps and collaboratively develop new practices, policies and behaviours that ensure data responsibility and cybersecurity is embedded across the organisation.

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.