Mind the gap and create new business opportunities with ethics in technology:

Creating the real change and impact on diversity

By Susan Omondi

Founder VALUE ADDITION

Thought-Leader Ethics & Diversity in Technology

Speaker, Trainer, Auditor, Live-Host

VALUEADDITION
Management | Training | Consulting

Have you ever asked yourself as an investor, a designer, idea creators, as a technology enthusiast or even as a project manager: "Who are we leaving behind"?

In recent development regarding COVID-19, people witness those who are being left out; either by not letting them in just because they did not install a registration app, or by ignoring the need to create accessible and affordable vaccinations for every human.

In another development, companies are facing major consequences of the global chip shortages. According to sources like CNBC the worlds majority of world's chips are made in China, yet the impact is felt globally. This dependency emphasizes the need for fair partnership outside countries.

You might think: "We can never include everyone". Yes, that is true. However, leaving it as such would not solve the global challenges we face and would even be neglecting our duty of care.

This paper addresses the diversity challenge we have been facing for decades. It further recommends 5 simple steps to start creating the change and shows how we can create new business opportunities by adopting design or services or even changing the target group.

Every decision we make has an impact. Every design has an impact. So let us design wisely.

Key takeaways:

1. Understanding the need to address ethics in technology.
2. How we can create new business opportunities by applying ethics in technology.
3. 5 simple steps to start creating change and impact on diversity with your solutions.

Table of contents

1. MINDING THE GAP

Are you creating solutions that bridge or widen the gap with your values, with your decisions or with your technological products?

If people do not mind the gap, then mostly because they are not aware of the consequences.

Changing perspective, creating room for dialogs, engaging others – all these are relevant aspects in dealing with diversity and inclusion. This applies to technological solutions as well.

Gone are the days when politics or laws were more powerful.

Today, AI, technological giants, media and entertainment, or a combination of these, are more powerful. Thus, each of us should create and use this responsibly.

Dr. Godfrey Odongo, a human right expert, once said, "Have you realized that your rights are now in your smartphone?"

For designers and idea creators, this would mean: "Have you realized how easy it is to neglect human rights, just by simply not considering them in your design?"

With Gandhis Thoughts: "In a gentle way, you can shake the world.", I invite you to read the few pages with an open mind.

In their blueprint "Inclusive Blueprint: Designing New Blueprint Tracks to Include People with Disabilities", Diego Normandi and Cibele Taralli highlight the need of inclusive design. They propose the reflection of disabled people inclusion in the development of services and addition of inclusive and accessible perspectives among its classic components ((Extracted from: D. Normandi and C. Taralli (2020): Perspectives in Design II, Inclusive Blueprint: Designing New Blueprint Tracks to Include People with Disabilities)

The aim of our solutions is to elevate the human element during the whole value chain, from idea creation, design, production, logistics, usage to recycling or disposal.

In a recent publication, AI WATCH, the European Commission knowledge service addresses risks and opportunities of continuously changing breakthroughs. If outperforming (breakthroughs) existing benchmarks remains the major indicator of innovation in the field of AI research, who will mind the gap?

It is time we mind the gap responsibly. With AI and technology, we have a great chance to bridge this gap. This will, in return, have a considerable impact on the mindset, economy, and development of individuals and countries.

2. WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT TO APPLY ETHICS AS A DESIGN-TOOL IN TECHNOLOGY

Morten Rand-Hendriksen, Webdesigner and developer at LinkedIn, addresses the need to use ethics as a design tool. His course is available at LinkedIn Learning, where he highlights the benefits and gives us tools to introduce this in a simple way.

One of his starting questions is: "How do you know whether your design will course harm or not?"

Ethics is in deed not something new. Our children learn this at school. We learned this at school. However, I rarely meet this discussion in the companies. As a sign that we have not reached the human fairness is the fact that we still systematically leave out specific countries out by defining them as third country or making travelling and working quite difficult across continents.

With AI and the technology pace, this is another chance to create a real impact on change and diversity.

Ethics is not morals. For this white paper, I will stick to the definition:

Ethics is what we agree upon as a group, a collection of moral codes.

Morals are different from person to person.

For example, in my keynotes regards ethics in technology, I always ask fans questions to help them understand the difference between morals and ethics, these are two examples of them are:

1. Who would you rather donate money to?

   A: To a "poor African child" or B "to a child in your neighborhood who needs a smartphone for homeschooling".

   Most people take A – because I do not give them the choice to say "it depends on".

2. If you find out your friend who is also your colleague is giving out data he/she is not support to do. Would you report him? Yes or No.

   Majority of people choose NO.

Morals are different from person to person. In the above examples, even people working for the same company, respecting the same company values, would choose different answers.

Ethics are agreed upon on a society, for a country or company etc.

The second takeaway in the first question is how we see people from Africa. Our perception is creating a devil's circle, as Germans would put it. We leave these people out at least in 3 ways:

1. The readiness to make them be and remain beggars. We are ready to donate food and money, instead of collaboration on an eye level. We leave them behind by making them dependent without really creating value to them and their environment.
2. Because most people who pay are in "comfortable situations", we ignore the people involved in the value chain, for instance the cobalt issue in regard to violating human rights. This sustainability issues do not need laws in the first step. They need me and you to take responsibility of what we are creating.
3. Our solutions leave others behind if we do not consider that there are other needs out of our "sites". For example, technology can play a great role to include people with disabilities. Most of the time, unfortunately, these are the people we systematically leave out.

Because Laws do not get adjusted to keep pace with the technology, I invite you as a business owner or investor to address ethical values with all your relevant stakeholders. What are the ethics governing the way you create solutions that have consequences on people interacting with them in different parts of the world?

It is therefore important to apply ethics, starting in a simple way so that you create even better business opportunities. Better means not only money wise but also with long-term impacts on diversity. Remember, with every design decision we build our future and the future of others. We modify capabilities of people and we create consequences. So let us do this responsibly.
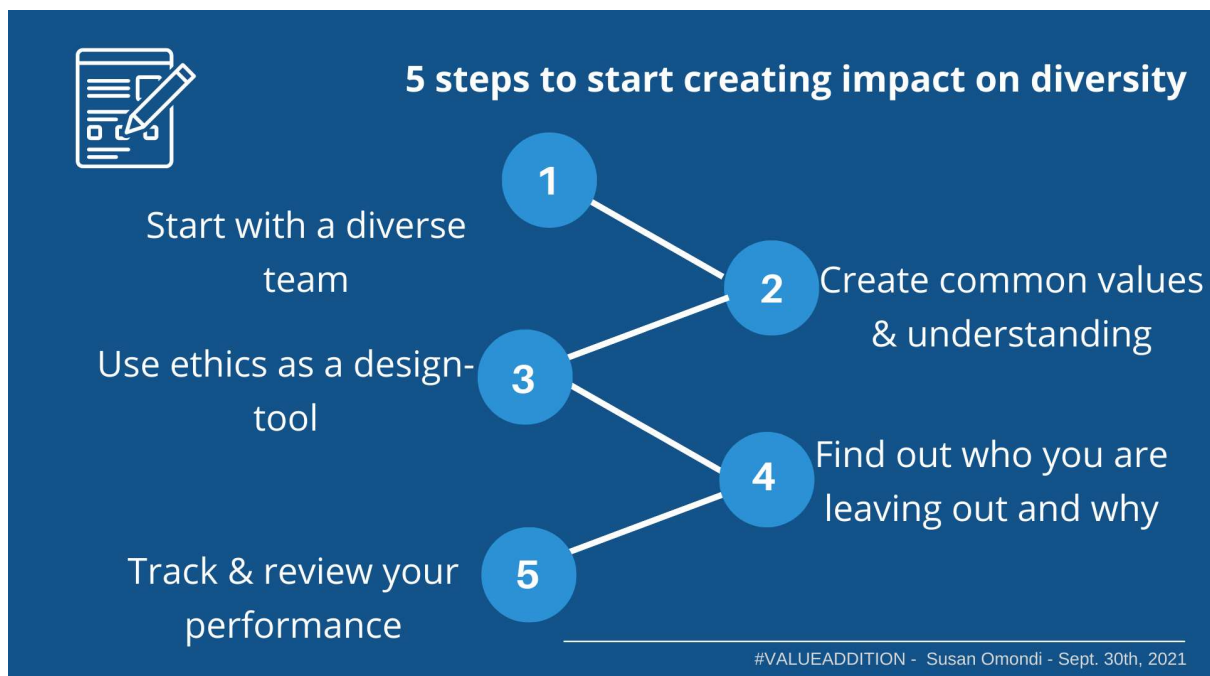
In a nutshell, why apply ethics?

1. For a sustainable impact, not only in the country we live in
2. For better business opportunities. Ethics will not hinder you for being faster than your competitors.

3. 5 SIMPLE STEPS TO START CREATING CHANGE AND IMPACT ON DIVERSITY WITH YOUR SOLUTIONS

As we become more aware of global challenges and are raising awareness, many tools, frameworks, and concepts do exist.

This paper introduces you to a simple approach and gives you 5 simple steps any organization, any investor or any team can apply to introduce ethic aspects.

This diagram gives you an overview of the five steps. The relevant questions and aspects to help you are discussed below.

5 steps to start creating impact on diversity

1 Start with a diverse team

2 Create common values & understanding

3 Use ethics as a design-tool

4 Find out who you are leaving out and why

5 Track & review your performance

#VALUEADDITION - Susan Omondi - Sept. 30th, 2021

Step 1: Start with a diverse team – no seat warmers

Is your team diverse enough for the solution you are providing? Is your team diverse enough to allow change of perspectives in considering different views easily?

Remember, diversity comes in many faces. These could apply to but not limited to:

1. Age diversity
2. Skin color
3. Citizenship
4. Talents
5. Problem-solving approaches
6. Professional expertise and levels

It could be that you already have a diverse team coincidentally. Good job. Now see that you allocate them wisely. Remember, it starts with the right people in the right boat.

Step 2: Create common values and understanding

To make sure you do not just have seat warmers for others to see that you have got a diverse team, create common values and understanding of your vision and mission.

Most companies have defined values. The best place to start a conversation about ethics is right here: what are our company values? The values do not stop after being created and visualized. Your values should be reflecting in the way you deal with your employees, and they should be reflecting in your solutions.

Act according to your values. Reflect this in your design and the way your solution changes the world.

Give people the feeling they are part of you, not just seat warmers, and that they are the multipliers of your ethical values. Talk about this and set goals to monitor your performance.

Define your knowledge strategy, including ethics. These questions will help you define and use a clear ethical knowledge strategy:

1. Where do you want your business to be in 5 or 10 years? What kind of ethical values would you like to reflect in your solutions in years to come?
2. Where do you want to be compared to your competitors?
3. What knowledge is relevant? Consider local and global trends in technology, in sustainability etc.
4. What knowledge about ethics in design and technology and talents do you already have in your organization? How is the knowledge shared?
5. What knowledge gap do you have, and how are you closing that gap? External/internal, make or buy? Where do you need double occupancy?
6. What do you want to achieve with the knowledge strategy? What do you want to achieve with the time gained, e.g., after automation?
7. Have you appointed a responsible person for the development and implementation of your knowledge and ethics strategy?
8. Is ethics and knowledge-management part of your culture? Are you aligning capabilities to meet future challenges?

Step 3: Use ethics as a design tool to ensure your solutions create a positive impact to the people interacting with it

After your team has understood your values and your vision, make sure you now use ethics as a design tool consistently.

Work through the consequences you create when you modify capabilities, through your virtue and duty ethics. This covers all aspects regarding data collection and securities, reporting policies, the whole value chain.

Make sure your solutions create value for the people and their environment.

Apart from them, ask yourself throughout the process whether anything could go wrong to avoid unintended consequences. In the context of diversity and sustainability, these would include questions in step 4.

Step 4: Check out other business opportunities by asking yourself: who are leaving out and why?

In most marketing and sales courses, experts insist on focusing on target groups. This idea, however, has limitations. It can easily lead us in ignoring those groups of people we have been ignoring since ages. If something is regarded to be a best practice, it is our duty to ask why before we copy it.

Ask yourself: who are we leaving out, and why are we leaving them out? Remember you might be leaving them out in many ways, for example:

1. By exploiting all their resources to enhance your technical solution
2. By not including them in the development process
3. By not including them in the use and application. For instance, an App is inaccessible in other countries or by people who are disabled.
4. By dumping your liter in their environment without duty of care
5. By continuing to marginalize a group of people we have been ignoring ever since. E.g., to cover your CO2 compensation, you just have to buy a certificate and donate money to Africa. Ask yourself: which message are you sending to the world and to your children?
6. By not including the relevant data in your AI training data
7. By misusing data of a group of people

Remember, these questions are not meant to slow your time to market. With these, you could be able to create the need for something better and identify a new market that meets your sustainable goals.

Step 5: Track and review your performance

This is not a onetime issue, nor it something you have to do in these sequences. Let this however always be a topic, for instance while:

3. reviewing your strategies, policies, values, your management goals and projects
4. empowering others. Make this for instance part of your personal development and trainings strategy.
5. considering an investment or a collaboration with other companies
6. planning your team building activities

Keep on weighing your activities against your values. Make this a habit.

It might make sense to work according to available standards like ISO 26000, a guidance on social responsibility.

4. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

As technology „moves" rapidly, faster than our government can agree on laws and regulations, faster than ethical standards defined by the global nations, we as investors, designers, power users, project leaders need to be aware of the gap we create. We need to be mind this gap responsibly.

Instead of waiting for the gap to widen so that we send money to the needy, we could ask ourselves: who are we really leaving behind, and why are we leaving these people behind?

The simple questions and the approach addressed in this paper will help you change your perspective and even create better business opportunities.

Remember, just like in the colonization era, long after we are gone, our decisions and designs will keep on changing the way people live. It would be irresponsible to continue leaving people behind systematically.

Diversity is not about encouraging seat warmers in your company. It is about creating the real change with our technological solutions, e.g., by ensuring our training data do not leave a group of people behind.

The key takeaways in this paper will ensure you a simple start. You have now understood:

1. the need to apply ethics in technology.
2. how we can create new business opportunities by applying ethics in design and technology.
3. the 5 simple steps to start creating change and impact on diversity with your solutions.

Closing with Gandhis thoughts:

"In a gentle way, you can shake the world.", I encourage to shake the world gently with technology.

5. REFERENCES / SOURCES

A) Diego Normandi, Cibele Taralli (2020): Inclusive Blueprint: Designing New Blueprint Tracks to Include People with Disabilities (extract from the book "Perspectives on Design II", Springer.

B) The study of AI Watch addressing the risks and opportunities the risks and opportunities of continuously chasing breakthroughs. https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/ai-research-risks-and-opportunities-continuously-chasing-breakthroughs

C) LinkedIn Learning "Creating Change: Diversity and Inclusion in the Tech Industry" by Craig Newmark, Kimberly Bryant, Tracy Chou, and Aubrey Blanche: https://www.linkedin.com/learning/creating-change-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-tech-industry/part-one-stories?u=26112626

D) LinkedIn Learning "Ethics in Design and Technology" by Morten Rand-Hendriksen": https://www.linkedin.com/learning/technology-and-design-ethics/towards-an-ethics-for-tech?u=26112626

E) LinkedIn Learning "Ethics in Design and Technology" adapted course in German language by Susan Omondi https://www.linkedin.com/learning/ethik-in-technologie-und-design/grundlagen-der-ethik-und-der-4-ecken-ansatz?u=26112626

F) Susan Omondi interviewing Morten Rand-Hendriksen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQuIZAQ0pKY