Caitlin McDonald:

Okay. So today's podcast, I'm joined by Sarah Drinkwater, who's the director of beneficial technology at Omidyar Network, which is a philanthropic investment firm. Sarah previously headed up Google's tech startups London campus and a global team working on Google maps. And she will be telling us about Omidyar Network's Ethical Explorer Pack and how it prepares small and medium-sized organizations to design ethics into their products and services right from the start of their thinking. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Great to be here, Caitlin.

Caitlin McDonald:

It's great to have you. So why don't we start off with a question? Actually, we mentioned a little bit in our rehearsal call, which was around definitions of ethics and how that can be quite a sticky area for people to start with.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Yeah. I think this is a fascinating question because ultimately ethics with a capital E is a longstanding academic function of many thousands of years. But on another level, with a small E is a very personal set of choices that we make individually as teams, as companies, as societies. And the technology that we're now using has such mass adoption. It's incredibly hard to get alignment. I guess the way that we've thought about it as a team is, for me, having come from conventional tech, the speed you work is very fast.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's always about the next launch, scaling, growing, reaching more people. I think what we're advocating for in general is a far more intentional set of decisions that you take, whether it's business product, et cetera. Even having that time to reflect built into your processes can help you make smarter choices.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And our thinking very much is that we say ethics, but really these are business risks. Really these are ways in which your company can be found wanting by regulators, by press, by your own employees, by the customers that you hope to serve. I think sometimes ethics can itself, as a phrase, seem very remote, very far from the day-to-day of building a business. But I don't believe that's the case. I think this is the whole new wave of how we think about building thoughtfully, sustainably, responsibly. Working contextually in the societies that we live in.

Caitlin McDonald:

That's such a great point about the various kinds of stakeholder groups that organizations have to deal with. And so that takes me quite nicely onto what is the Ethical Explorer Pack, and who is it for, and how do you know when it's the right time to use it?

Sarah Drinkwater:

So this came from... We are an unusual organization. We started about 15, 16 years ago and [inaudible 00:02:57] we grew up in Silicon Valley, we started off to [inaudible 00:03:00] eBay and we grew up alongside many of the world's most dominant tech companies now. And the first 15 years we were

impact investors. We invested non-profit and for-profit into companies that worked on education, financial inclusion, civic and gov tech. And after a while we began, particularly after the last election, we began asking ourselves the complicated problems of our time, like are individual companies enough? And we kept thinking, okay, no, you have to both work with and build individual companies, but also be more thoughtful about policy, cross industry muscle, community building. And that's where we are now. We use a range of levers, whether it's for-profit investing, grant making, community building or direct product building, like Ethical Explorer, to reach our goal.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And this particular product, Ethical Explorer, came from this need that we kept hearing from early stage teams. If you're at a Facebook or a Google or an Ikea or a bank, you normally will have somebody who's the chief data officer or the chief ethics officer, chief responsibility officer. These teams are great, but they're a luxury that only certain companies can afford. And we were curious about if you're a small company, the chief ethics officer tends to be the CEO. But CEOs, I've worked a lot with startups. They're very busy. This product responded to the need that we heard from product managers, engineers, designers, founders, and their collaborators, for a tool to help them think through really hard topics. Whether it's algorithmic bias, exclusion, these things are huge. We can often feel as though we have to have a PhD to talk and think about them, but that's not really the case.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Ultimately algorithmic bias affects our customers, friends, colleagues, coworkers that we care about. Exclusion, these are topics that are, at once, incredibly highfaluting, but also very real. So the Ethical Explorer is basically a toolkit. It's digestible, it's accessible, it's free. I think that's very important to us that it was able to be accessible by all, both digitally and physically, if you're based in the US. Unfortunately, we can't do that globally, just because of the sheer scale of people that we've had want one so far. It's a set of eight risk paths that look at topics such as surveillance, bad actors, monopoly power, or outsize power, I should say. And it's a set of two cards, one outlines the problem, why is this? Why could this be a bad thing? Why could this thing be a bad thing? And the second card is a set of questions that you can ask yourself individually, in a team, in a company, or more broadly about what your company is doing and can do better.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And then outside of the set of eight risk cards, we also have a bunch of exercises that you could use to show you how to use the... I haven't had enough coffee so far this morning. A set of exercises that show you how you could use the cards and language that you can use within your company to get by and to even have this conversation. And part of the persona we built this for was somebody that we called the Ethical Explorer. This person is the pioneer in that company. They're always the one raising their hand. And I think often when we think about ethics, we think about it negatively. We think about, Oh, let's stop doing this. Let's not do that. But I don't think of it like that at all. Ultimately Ethical Explorers are pioneers. They're forging new ground, they're asking hard questions, they're pushing the company. That was the intended audience for this toolkit.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And we designed it to be... The language is very accessible. We worked with a lot of experts on these hard topics, but then we digested the language and just made it really approachable for early stage founders, that are maybe 24 years old, they've come out of university, that are doing computer science.

Not that every founder is like that, but that's definitely a stereotype that does exist in the real world. And what we've learned since launching it, is that it appeals to a far broader group. We had not conceived it as working for large companies, but apparently it does. We had not conceived it as working for universities, but apparently it does. And we're very agnostic. Our success is, first of all, we want this tool to be useful. Second of all, we want the tool to contribute to a far broader conversation that's happening around the tools that we need to build, and the fact that those tools need to be universally accessible.

Sarah Drinkwater:

They cannot be boundaried just by the richest companies of our time, because that perpetuates the problem. I think the tool will be improved by those that use it. We included a blank risk card for a reason. We closed the product and design of it the second week of March, which in California is when we went into lockdown. At the time, it was pretty clear the pandemic was coming, but we had no idea the scale of it. We just had no concept of how big it would be. The racial justice protests. I think both of those topics around exclusion, structural racism, but also societal implications of how we're all interconnected, are deeply embedded in the language of the Ethical Explorer, but they're not explicitly named. And obviously a pandemic has incredible impact on a business in ways that are unpredictable even now.

Caitlin McDonald:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And there's so much to unpack in that answer, but what I'm going to land on is the concept of the Ethical Explorer as a persona representing who the Ethical Explorer Pack is for. And what I'm hearing is it's for people who might have quite high responsibility, but perhaps low domain knowledge about this space?

Sarah Drinkwater:

No, I actually don't agree with you on that. I think it varies enormously. I think when we say domain expertise, often that comes down to, say for example, at my last startup in 2009 or 10, there were three of us. I was the only non-technical person. I was the only woman and I owned everything that touched our users. And I hate that phrase, but community. People that use the product. And so there was me, there was the CTO, there was CEO. And every time I would come back and say, "Hey, people think this." That people think this gave me space and cover to ask for what I actually wanted. Because I knew. I had the intuition people wanted it. I think who this is for is people who passionately care about doing the right thing. People who passionately want to work on building the future. People who not afraid, or at least are less afraid of having an opinion in public.

Sarah Drinkwater:

I don't think there needs to be any particular domain knowledge at all, to be honest. The whole point of the kit is you don't need to come in having... You don't need to come in having read a lot around surveillance capitalism, for example, talk about surveillance and why selling to ice might not be a good thing. I think all of us now, there are certain topics that are very much in public and there's an awful lot of information out there, but I don't want people to feel as if they have to go and study or read a book beforehand. The whole point of the pack is it's very lightweight.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. That's what I was saying. That you have low domain knowledge. So you're using the pack to help you expand your domain knowledge.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Yeah. And I think also we're very agnostic about... We have additional reading lists on the website about what else you might want to read. Say you think a particular topic is a particular risk area for your company, you're going to want to read more about it. So we've tried to pull together, with all the experts, what are the 10 must reads on exclusion, for example. But I'm still curious. We have a survey and interviews live right now with a bunch of people who've been using the kit for the last two months or six weeks, I should say. It's been out for six weeks. I don't know. The information they've come back with is so different from what we expected. It's been quite joyful actually, because they've used it in such wildly divergent ways.

Sarah Drinkwater:

We have some people that are using it as part of design sprints to create whole new products. They're using it as a thought starter before any design sprint. We have others that are using it... One of the exercises we included was celebrating what was being done well. I think there are very few companies that get everything right. None I would argue, but there are many companies that get some things right. You look at Pinterest and their work around anti-vax content, despite the fact they had a whistleblowing incident recently. So many companies get some things right. And I think it's quite, in a landscape like this, particularly in the US where the election is coming, people are feeling anxious and fearful. It's so good to celebrate what we have done well, because it makes you realize, okay, this one thing went well, we can expand that work. We can test out other things. You know what I mean?

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. Completely. And I think that that's a really critical component, as well as understanding not only what you, yourself, as a company are doing well, but looking to examples. I'm thinking now of the Salesforce human rights commitments, for example. Or Microsoft does really great things on accessibility. And every company has ethical issues that they have to grapple with, but there's definitely examples out there of large and small organizations that are doing really great things as well.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Yeah. And I wish that were more. To your point, I sometimes think it's easier for B2B companies. Mark Benioff could take a very particular... Knowing many of that team who are fantastic. Both Microsoft and Salesforce have hired particularly smart people. It's different for B2B. They can take a decision about who they want their customers to be. I mean, obviously there's a financial risk there. You will make less money, but they've taken choices that have really bonded other customers to them in a very loyal and longterm real way. I think for B2C companies, particularly the largest ones of our time, there are even harder trade offs to make because the person that you're serving is incredibly broad. And I think, with small companies, what I'm excited about and what I think there is still room for, I would love to see more stories of very small companies taking hard choices.

Sarah Drinkwater:

We funded a great podcast called Should This Exist? That Catherina Fake MCs. It's really fun. It's very playful. And every episode a founder comes and talks to what they're building. A very small scale, early stage startup. And then a panel of experts from Esther Perel, the relationship coach, to Sam Altman

from YC, dismantle it. And without fail, it's always a really inspiring, thought-provoking session because there are no conclusions made. They play out what benefits it brings, but also the risks. And I think what's great about that program is there are so few public examples of the kind of things small companies grapple with. I remember having one campus for four years in London, every single day I was hearing firsthand.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's part of the reason why I came to Omidyar Network, to be honest, is everyday I would meet amazing founders who would be deeply swayed by their investors or unable to get investment for the original idea and have to move what they're doing. Constant hard choices being made. It was something that really struck me as it's very hard to stay your original course as a founder. The best founders tend to have incredible focus, but also be flexible. But if we really want to encourage better, more positive futures for all, then it goes back as well to the enabling structures, the investment, who gets to found companies in the first place? Because naturally the more diverse founder group you have, the more they're going to be serving a broader group of customers.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah, yeah. And those complexities of scale, you face different kinds of ethical challenges when you move from being a tiny startup that's trying something out with five customers, to one that's serving hundreds, to one that serving thousands.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's huge. And I think one thing that's not as well understood, I think one of the challenges about the responsible tech scene is... Sorry, that's my son having a little meltdown next door. If you look at the responsible tech community in the last 10 years, it's been very strongly driven a lot by academics. There's been a very strong, theoretical academic lens to it, which is very important. But it means that it's very hard to convey the chaos and the feel of a scaling team or a scaling company, if you've not worked in that environment. Because some of the things I look back on at previous companies I've been at and I'm like, we just didn't have time. Or we just didn't think about it because we were just so focused on this one thing and stupid decisions get made or don't get made. I think the largest companies in the world don't really have excuses anymore, but certainly for scale ups, I have a lot of empathy for that journey of scale, because that's what your investors demand. I mean, I would argue that scale is the root of many of our problems.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. And I think to some extent, talking now about very large companies, you're seeing some of that language change. So if you look at something like the business round table coming out and saying, actually sustainability has to be part of what you're doing. You're not only growing profits, you also have to be developing products that are in the interest of the communities that you serve. And that was a huge thing for something as quite staid as the business round table to say that. So I think that there is a shift that we're seeing, but whether that shift is only linguistic, as opposed to being really embedded in what the companies are doing, is the question.

Sarah Drinkwater:

I think that's a really good question because I noticed that, whether it's BlackRock the year before or the business round table, you look at the journey of the Financial Times in the last year, which I'm fascinated

by. New editor, who seems amazing. You're seeing the FT, the classic business paper, write editorials about how Uber drivers are workers, not contractors. These are ideological shifts that speak to the [inaudible 00:15:39] that we're in. And that has an incredible ability to influence the business leaders of our time. I think the BlackRock and the business round table moments are important. They make great headlines. I just want to see more follow up. I want to see more like if you're a member of the business round table, what does that mean? What new leaders do you need to bring on?

Sarah Drinkwater:

What new incentive mechanisms do you need to put in place? Because ultimately every business leader right now is... This is an incredibly stressful and anxiety-making year. We have multiple crisis happening at once, health crisis, economic crisis, racial justice crisis in the US, democratic crisis. For sure. I think there's a lot of really great intent, but I think we need to put more thinking into what are the structures that enable this intent? And to me, it all comes back to incentivization. Our journey and my journey at Omidyar Network. When I joined in 2018, I think I had quite an old fashioned view of power. When we launched the team that I now co-run, we had a supposition that if we were simply able to influence five men in Silicon Valley to rethink the way they lead their companies, everything would shift.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And it just became clear, after months and months of work, that there are people in every big company in the world that are aligned values-wise, but the incentives themselves do not align. You have your shareholders and your stakeholders. And they shout very loudly and capitalism is a hell of a drug. And so really for us, our work in time has become much more centered on the worker. I think you're seeing the shift in many places right now. I'm fascinated by two years ago, there was this massive wildfire of newsrooms unionizing in the US. I think particularly important for journalists right now, because the essential quality job that's been decimated by the technology anyhow. I think we're seeing the rise of interest in worker-like collectives, unions. Smart CEOs should be thinking about this. You see Amazon yesterday putting out a job spec for a union buster and then pulling it fast. But of course the entire internet screenshotted it first. I think good bosses do not want to be in oppositional situations for their entire workforce. No, that doesn't benefit anybody.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree with you there. And I think fundamentally when we're talking about ethics, a lot of what we're talking about is power distribution. And that really can be quite uncomfortable, I think, especially for C-level folks to really think about and talk about these issues, because it feels overly, perhaps, party political. Whereas in reality, you're constantly dealing with power disjunctures when you are building things, when you're making things, when you're trying to attract customers and staff to your organization. And so you have to be able to have these conversations openly.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's funny. So the Ethical Explorer was derived partly from the EthicalOS that came out in 2018. That was our first attempt at putting out products in this space. We're really proud of it, but it fit at the time. 2020, it felt a bit clunky, a bit long. And when we looked at the cards and what felt most important this year, we worked over the winter with an incredible group of very generous people who are in our target audience, that gave us their time to help make this good. And we ran dinners in San Francisco, in New York, with maybe 12 people, but we previewed the kit and asked for feed back. And this is part of a long

process of co-creation. For us, it was really important this was grounded in the people it was trying to [inaudible 00:19:07].

Sarah Drinkwater:

And what was fascinating is the San Francisco conversation. And both of them were very enjoyable, I should say, for different reasons. San Francisco was a lot of good tech people, great conversation, very practical, very tactical. In New York, the conversation in the first five minutes, capitalism and racism. Power was the main topic of that conversation. And I think in New York, particularly, like London, my amazing hometown, many industries, finance, media, many historically powerful industries that have seen the growth of techs power. In Silicon Valley you take it for granted because it's the industry. But for us, it meant we had a massive debate around what to... We only had eight cards in the kit and we decided to include outsize power as a card.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And what that meant is that sustainability sadly got knocked out. And next time, I think we'll definitely include it because we've had so much feedback on that. But for me it was such an opportunity to think about what do we mean by outsize power? Because I think we understand the world works on a set of invisible strings, charisma, power, call it what you want. Structures that we live in. But beneath that, there's a piece around not all monopolies are bad, but some monopolies can be bad. You look at the history of antitrust in the US going back to the railroads, and this is my Marx reading as a teenager, but the means of production being controlled by very few people at a time when people needed railroads. I think there were real conversations to be had. You look at the challenges that someone like Facebook is having right now. There are whole swathes of Sub-Saharan Africa where Facebook is the internet. The problems that causes for a company, regulatory problems, just the awful things. The lynching cases in India that happened when WhatsApp is able to forward to hundreds of people at once.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. And then you get into a whole range of conversations around defacto. If the situation is that Facebook is the only way to access the internet in those places, then simply to say, well, let's all delete Facebook. You actually need to serve the people who are still in that scenario in some way and to provide a realistic plan for...

Sarah Drinkwater:

Yeah. And I don't think it's... I mean, this is the question that I think about a lot, is how much of the solution is working to re-imagine what the biggest tech companies look like? Versus working to build compelling solutions. I think it's a bit of both. I mean, I have a very strong belief that new competitors will bubble up that will... You look at Tik Tok and it's a whole world of complexity. But you look at very young people that... My youngest friends, they don't use any of the channels I use. They maybe use Instagram but they don't use WhatsApp, they don't use Facebook. But my supposition is that there's going to be new platforms that emerge that have incredible purchase and sway with very young people who tend to be very popular.

Sarah Drinkwater:

My assumption also is that I really want to see alternatives to the advertising model. I don't think the ad model serves us well, as consumers of the internet. I also think that you can't ignore the Facebooks and Googles because they do offer such convenience to so many people. If we're genuinely saying to

consumers, we will only get a good internet if you delete X, Y, Z. First of all, it's a very Western-centric view of the world. Having lived in places like Israel, where there's no Uber. India, where Amazon is incredibly... Only half a million people ordered more than five items off Amazon last year. Amazon has no purchase in India at all. So many of the... Well, I'm trying to say a lot of things at once here, I think.

Sarah Drinkwater:

A lot of the hammering that we do about certain companies presupposes our version of the internet is common everywhere. It's not. Having worked a lot in Korea, Google wasn't even the number one search when I worked a lot there. There are all kinds of ways in which the world is very different. I think there are... You look at what's happening in India now with Reliance Jio. There are places like India where American and Chinese values are playing out. I think there are so many shifts happening right now that we need to at once look at regulatory solutions that curtail the largest platforms and also charm those working inside big tech to do better, while also building and growing alternates.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. Yeah. I like to think of it as there being three large levers. You have the regulatory lever, you have the reputational lever, and you have the revenue slash profit lever. And all of those things can act to change companies.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's funny, we've really observed the growth of a fourth lever around talent. I think that's really what I've bet a lot of our funding, just because, for me, having left a visible job at a large tech company, I remember how hot I was at that point in time. And that I very much... ON was my dream. I came to the place that I wanted to be, but there is a piece around, even in a recession, you still have an incredible need for, particularly, roles like software engineers. I think people forget about sales, but sales is a skill in itself and very hard to hire for. Tech companies tend to be very comfortable working remotely. They pay well. These people have power. That's why tech organizing has been so popular.

Caitlin McDonald:

Hugely. And actually one of the things that, there was a responsible technology survey, I think it was two years ago in the UK, which showed that people that were working on AI are much more likely to want to work for responsible organizations. And that can be a huge influence, as you say, in terms of talent attraction.

Sarah Drinkwater:

We actually ran the survey. That was funded by us, Doteveryone (RIP). We funded a very similar survey in the US recently, because we were curious about, in the COVID world, what has changed? And I think what was interesting is, for a certain set of workers, yes, they're going to be hunkering down, grateful for their jobs, not looking up. For another set of workers there's a much stronger drive towards purpose. And I think this is an inherent shift in the working world in the last 30 or 40 years. Certainly, so I'm 40 years old. When I started work 20 years ago, it was my expectation that I would do nothing for the first five years of my career. That I would photocopy and do donkey work. And that was just how it was. And my bosses gave stupid requests and I did it and I never spoke up.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It was just how the world was. And many of the leaders that now run companies, and obviously in tech they can be younger, many of the CEOs of companies are my age and older. And we came into the working world at the same time. But the talent that we manage, the talent that we hire, expects more, demands more in ways that can be a little bit confusing. And they've become, I think particularly, I believe very strongly in transparency. That's something that's a big thing for me in how I lead. I believe very firmly in servant leadership and getting out of the way. But again, these are quite new ideas. And I think there are some really interesting clashes bubbling up between the techno utopianism that took hold in the naughties that was so well-marketed by Stewart brand and co, clashing with a lot of the people that came into tech about the same time as I did, looking for that utopianism. That are now realizing, hang on, we're the bad guys. Therefore you either pay me a lot more money, or I go to a company that pays less and I do good.

Caitlin McDonald:

Or in some cases, go to another company that pays well and can do good, which is one of the things that we discovered on the ethical digital tour that we ran at LEF in 2019.

Sarah Drinkwater:

It's fascinating. I think there's a really interesting piece around how we've been interested for a while in how do you learn about culture before you go somewhere? So for example, the reason why the whistle blowing at Pinterest was so frustrating to me is I've been really... I'd admired a lot of the steps they'd taken in the last couple of years, led by Ifeoma Ozoma, who actually was the whistleblower. So I think there are certain companies, Glitch, for example, Base Camp that have a real status and purchase at a certain level. But they're small. They're not the largest companies. There was a really interesting survey that came out recently that I was looking at that said Facebook on average pays 20% more for developers than any other large tech company, including Amazon.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And it made me realize, I saw a similar survey 10 years ago, looking at employees in oil and gas and looking at, the more disreputable a company, and I'm using quote marks in the air because I don't want to get sued, the more likely it was that company would pay more. So I think we're very much now in a place where, particularly in environments like the Bay area and London, where cost of living is very expensive, in the US where student loans are insane, where healthcare is insane. People are making hard choices and responsibility, those that can afford to put responsibility first will. I think for a lot of other people these are real economic choices I think employees have to make.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah, I'm going to take us in a slightly different direction now. So one of the things I wanted to ask you about was the playfulness and the rich design of the Ethical Explorer Pack and how those design choices really relate to the educational experience of using it.

Sarah Drinkwater:

So the credit for all of this must go to our amazing design partner Artifact, who are based in Seattle, who I highly recommend for all of your design needs. We looked at the EthicalOS and it's an 80 slide deck. It's lovely, but it felt hard to get into. I think for us, we always... I'm a big fan of playing cards. I love physical artifacts, particularly. You can see, I love to read. I'm a very big book person. And if I think about where I get my inspiration, it's very rarely on the internet. It's nearly always off the internet. I'll read a quote in a

book, I'll have a picture on the wall. I'll speak to a friend. We started out from the bias of, we really wanted to have a physical artifact.

Sarah Drinkwater:

And then we were thinking about, okay, if you are this Explorer, you're uncovering new terrain. It feels a little bit... We were thinking of the analogies of discovery, like how it feels when you're a child looking for treasure, when you're building a tree house, when you're seeing the world for the first time, and all of the joy and the risk that comes with that. And that led to a set of design choices around typography, around the harms of nature. Because I think what we're trying to say, whether it's the snake for surveillance, whether it's the bears taking your honey for data control. What we were trying to say is that it would be so obvious for us to go in design choices that spoke of tubes and computers.

Sarah Drinkwater:

But we were like, okay, actually, let's bring this back to things that we know. Things we grew up with. Things that we see as children in cartoon children's books as risks. And that made it feel... We wanted it to feel beautiful and delightful as well as useful. I just have a very strong belief that things that look beautiful, you're more likely to have on your desk. You're more likely to look at again. You're more likely to put on your wall. You're more likely to be inspired by.

Caitlin McDonald:

And people walk by and they say, "Well, what is that?" If it's a lovely PowerPoint slide, probably not so much, or a spreadsheet.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Yeah. That definitely was a consideration. I think we also planned this at a time where we thought people would have it on their desks at work. Whereas now it's like, actually one thing we've heard from people who've got the kit in person is, "Wow, how delightful to have post in my house." We've heard that from so many people. And I think I have mine here on my desk and I look at it. I think just the feel of it, the feel of the stickers, which we've heard are very popular. It's designed to be something that you hold dear. It's designed to be something that you're not precious about and that you can ruin it. You can rip it, whatever, it's just cardboard. But we also want to do something you'd come back to and say, "Yeah, that taught me something. I learned something and I am an Ethical Pioneer, and this is a kit that I take to my colleagues and I build my reputation through using this."

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. I think the tangibility element really adds a lot to the experience of interacting with ideas. What do you see as the next need in terms of organizations that are wanting to enhance digital ethics? Is there an Explorer Pack part two? What's what's coming next?

Sarah Drinkwater:

One thing I think about a lot. We have a lot of things going live this autumn that I can't talk about just yet. But one thing I think about a lot is the cross industry muscle. I took part in Stanford's first class this year by Rob Reich and Hilary Cohen. There basically was an evening course around tech public policy and ethics. Fascinating. And it was for 50 professionals in Silicon Valley. And for the most part, people applied, there was a lightweight application process. It was comparatively affordable and most companies paid for it. For the most part, those that took it were PMs and engineers at Uber, Amazon,

Palantir, Facebook, et cetera. And the whole evening class was basically activating a new group. And the biggest thing I learned from this program was the education was great.

Sarah Drinkwater:

The team at Stanford were fantastic. It was the peer network. It was having somebody to go to. What I kept hearing in that group was people would say, "Oh, I can't really talk about this at work. I'm not sure I can talk about this at work." So I think there's a massive piece around collective learning. I think there's a massive piece around collective communities that can champion this work. You look at someone like Google and of course they're my old employer so I'm biased, but they've activated... Google has this 20% policy where you spend one day a week on a side project, which I always took advantage of and was a great joy of my time there. They've activated a set of responsible champions inside the company to be embedded within different teams. And it's a way of, on a very blunt level, it's a way for certain people to build their profile and get promoted.

Sarah Drinkwater:

On one level it's great for the individuals to build themselves up, but on a larger, connective level... And of course, there's a question of capture there and whether these people can do their work without being spied on, et cetera. But I think we need this to exist within companies, but I think we also need this to exist within industry. There are no professional bodies that really exist. Now, for me, having worked in magazines before and in advertising, there are all kinds of, particularly in advertising, there are all kinds of structures. It's nice that glug that exists, that if you work in advertising, there is this network of people you can talk about ideas with. You can share the next big thing. I think in tech we've not been very good at that. It's been very much on a company by company basis. And I think there is a need and an appetite for more in that area. And I'm confident we will fund things in the space in the next year, we just need to find them.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. And there's so many more things I would love to dive into with you. Unfortunately I know you have to go off and do things and we can't run these endlessly, but I would love to know any last words, final thoughts, key takeaway messages?

Sarah Drinkwater:

I think particularly for your audience, this is a hard year for leaders. I feel that personally. We are dealing with incredible tailwinds in a business context. We have stressed out anxious teams, while we ourselves are also stressed out and anxious. I think there are really big opportunities for this new wave of leaders to emerge. You look at the Paul Pollman's in the last couple of years, leaving Unilever and going on to found a consultancy focused on ethical business. Rob Chesnuts at Airbnb, leaving and writing a book on it. I think there are incredible opportunities for new forms of leadership. I think it's smart to get ahead of the regulatory environment and what employees ask for anyhow. I think it's going to be interesting seeing, to your point around the business round table and BlackRock, what actually changes. Because part of this is deciding what we don't do as well as what we do do.

Caitlin McDonald:

Yeah. Such a great point. And thank you so much for joining us today.

Sarah Drinkwater:

Thanks, Caitlin, great to speak.

Pip Ryan:

Thanks for listening to the Growing Digital Ethics in Practice podcast. You can find out more about the Omidyar Network's Ethical Explorer Pack at ethicalexplorer.org. And you can find out more about the Leading Edge Forum Perspective on digital ethics by typing the phrase, stemming sinister tides into Google, where the top results should be our 2019 position paper, stemming sinister tides: sustainable digital ethics through evolution.