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Ethical technology isn't just for big tech

Every organization has the power
to advance responsible uses of
the tools we all depend on

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The importance of trustworthy and ethical technology appears frequently in the news. Even if your organization is not in what's traditionally considered "big tech," you may have questions about what's expected of you in this fast-evolving environment. Deloitte has faced those questions too.



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Introduction

Deloitte has professionals who consider themselves technologists and professionals who do not. But we all shape and use technology in our jobs. Organizations use technology to recruit, hire, track, and deploy people; to engage with customers; to deliver goods and perform services; and to present their brands and practices to the world.

Every use of technology involves subjective decisions in the ways we create and use it. Every use ultimately affects real people's lives. And because today we say every company is a technology company at its core, each one has an obligation to take a critical eye to the ways they design and use technology—to be aware of potential harms—and to take positive action to avoid them.

We're making a coordinated effort to build ethical technology practices into all our work. There is no standard road map for this, and there aren't plug-and-play solutions waiting along the way. If you're on a similar journey, our experiences may help shed some light on what it takes, what works, and what comes next.



Setting the foundation

As we have noted, ethical technology is a team sport. Like any other initiative, it needs champions and leaders, but it takes more than one person or committee to drive the organization-wide change it requires. This is a shared responsibility that requires broad collaboration across an enterprise.

Having a tech-savvy workforce and purpose-driven enterprise set in the core values of trust and continuous learning can help ground your people's responsibility in this important effort. They are the foundation on which you can build an ethical tech organization—a foundation that includes not only the what and how, but also the why.

The case for ethical practices is both moral and practical: Trustworthy and ethical technology is not something any organization can afford to ignore. Failing to consider it presents unwarranted risks—to legal liability, reputation, competitive performance, and trust, both internal and external.



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Setting the foundation

If you try to define and codify every responsible practice, complexity and change will quickly outpace you. But when the people in your organization embrace ethical technology as a shift in mindset, they can be more prepared to apply that perspective to emerging technology and meet new challenges with agility.

In shaping your organization's unique foundation for technology ethics, trust, purpose, and values are generally key building blocks. Shifting expectations, both internal and external, are pushing organizations to take stances—

and action—on issues such as education; sustainability; climate change; diversity, equity and inclusion; and ethical technology. A basis in values—your values—is the way to make sure your responses are consistent and reflect who you are.

People make ethical decisions every day. This is just a new arena in which to do so. When it comes to technology, you don't have to give them a new ethical code—you have to give them new lenses.

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Education and engagement

Once your people understand the importance of trustworthy and ethical technology, it's vital to help them see their own roles in promoting it and give them the skills to identify, debate, and mitigate ethical tech risks.

Some of your people may already see their role in the conversation, while others might need concrete examples of why and how this applies to them. What can help them understand which day-to-day cases may present ethical tech risks, interrogate those risks from a variety of perspectives, and design approaches to address potential harms?

At Deloitte, we approached this challenge from several directions. We also looked outside our doors for specialized guidance from leaders in this space, including thought leaders, academia, research groups, and industry.

- We adapted an existing decision-making framework to give our professionals a consistent approach for identifying, debating, and mitigating ethical tech risks.
- We created a library of industry-based use cases, stemming from real projects and technology advances, so our professionals can see questions of technology ethics through the lens of issues they and their clients deal with every day.



Education and engagement

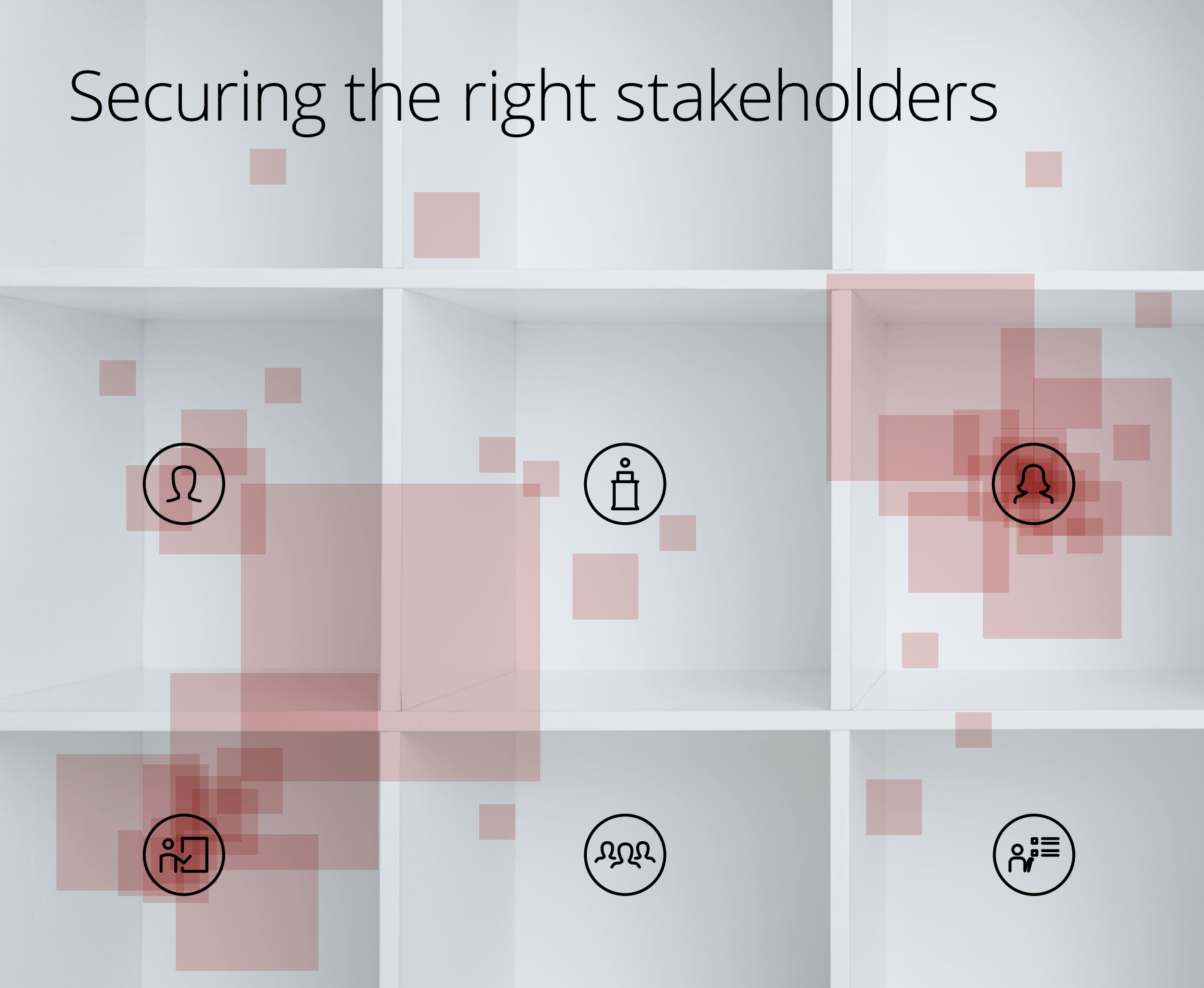
We also created formal immersive training to help our people understand technology ethics and build the “muscle memory” of the questions you should ask and considerations you should make in ethical tech decision-making. To give people a variety of options to learn and engage in the topic, Deloitte developed and deployed resources such as gamified learning, a mobile app, short videos, and podcasts. A blog and discussion forum give people an avenue to cultivate more diverse perspectives, check their blind spots, and share lessons with their colleagues.

In all these efforts, we are guided by the idea that people respond more to principles that resonate with them than they do to rules someone else imposes on them. An important takeaway is that each person has not only the permission but also the responsibility to make a difference. We’ve all heard the stories of assembly line operations in which every worker, at every level, is empowered to call everything to a halt if something’s wrong. For trustworthy and ethical technology, your people should embrace the same permission.

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Securing the right stakeholders



Your organization's "heat map"

The ways trustworthy and ethical technology manifests in people's work will likely vary from one part of your organization to another. We found it helpful to assess the various units and teams across our organization according to the technologies with which they engage and the levels or impacts of ethical risk they would likely encounter. That allowed us to apply different levels of rigor, through oversight and processes, accordingly.

There is a similar landscape of technology ethics across your organization, and it's unique to you. Knowing where the "hot spots" for ethical tech risks lie can help you pinpoint where you'll need to find and cultivate champions for trustworthy and ethical technology. These are the people who can help convey its relevance back to their teams and drive adoption of ethical tech behaviors.



Securing the right stakeholders

In most cases, business unit owners and leaders will be the ones who have the visibility and the power to drive change. Technology, innovation, risk management, and legal leaders are likely to have roles. But so are superficially “non-technological” people whose work either affects the use of technology or affects business outcomes because of the use of technology.

In our case, we worked from the top down and the center out to recruit and inspire stakeholders. We established buy-in from senior executives and board members, while also deputizing top business area leaders to drive the adoption and operationalization of trustworthy and ethical technology practices across the organization.

Some organizations have established new leadership roles to drive this focus, such as a “Chief Technology Ethics Officer.” At Deloitte, we entrusted that responsibility to a centralized leader who would be able to drive an organization wide approach and strategy with one foot in technology and one foot in the organization’s Purpose Office—while also emphasizing that our development and business teams still had the responsibility for decision-making on specific ethical tech dilemmas.

Deloitte also established Trustworthy and Ethical Technology as a working group in its own right, with a mandate to take a leading role in understanding this issue, convening dialogues that can advance and spread that understanding, and pioneering strategies and tools to bring more ethical practices into use.

And we made sure our people had a path forward: When you’ve “made the sale” and won people’s hearts and minds for a mindset shift like this, their next question will be: What do I do about it? Sometimes we’ve known the answers. Sometimes we’ve worked together to find them.

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Making it real: Process implementation

Any time a theory becomes practice, people need to understand what's expected of them. Have you set expectations that allow your people to execute in a consistent manner? And are there checkpoints and standards that everyone knows and expects to satisfy?

At Deloitte, we are taking steps to make our implementation of trustworthy and ethical technology practices clear and actionable.

We're creating assessment tools and decision-making frameworks to help people apply ethical principles to their work. We are aligning the day-to-day pursuit of technology ethics in our business groups with the work of colleagues in risk, compliance, and legal functions. And we are developing processes, escalation paths, and governance so each one of our team members can support the adoption of technology ethics in ways that complement their core work.

To help guide our daily work, we are identifying gates, triggers, and milestones and clarifying who is responsible for enforcing their use. We are training our teams to approach ethical questions with deliberate mitigation strategies that let them "show their moral math," and establishing review panels to help consult on difficult or high-visibility decisions. And across the organization, a continuous process of evaluation and improvement folds technology ethics into an ongoing life cycle.

This isn't a simple exercise; nor can this be a one-time effort. Every company experiences personnel turnover, and newcomers will always need guidance to understand trustworthy and ethical technology and join their colleagues in promoting it.

Part of this long-term commitment to trustworthy and ethical technology should include self-diagnostics. It's important to regularly assess what decisions have been made, measure results, and determine how to adapt your processes to learn from real-life outcomes. Learning and adapting doesn't only make this work more efficient and effective. It also improves the results that count: the fairer, more inclusive, more sustainable technology practices that are the ultimate objective.



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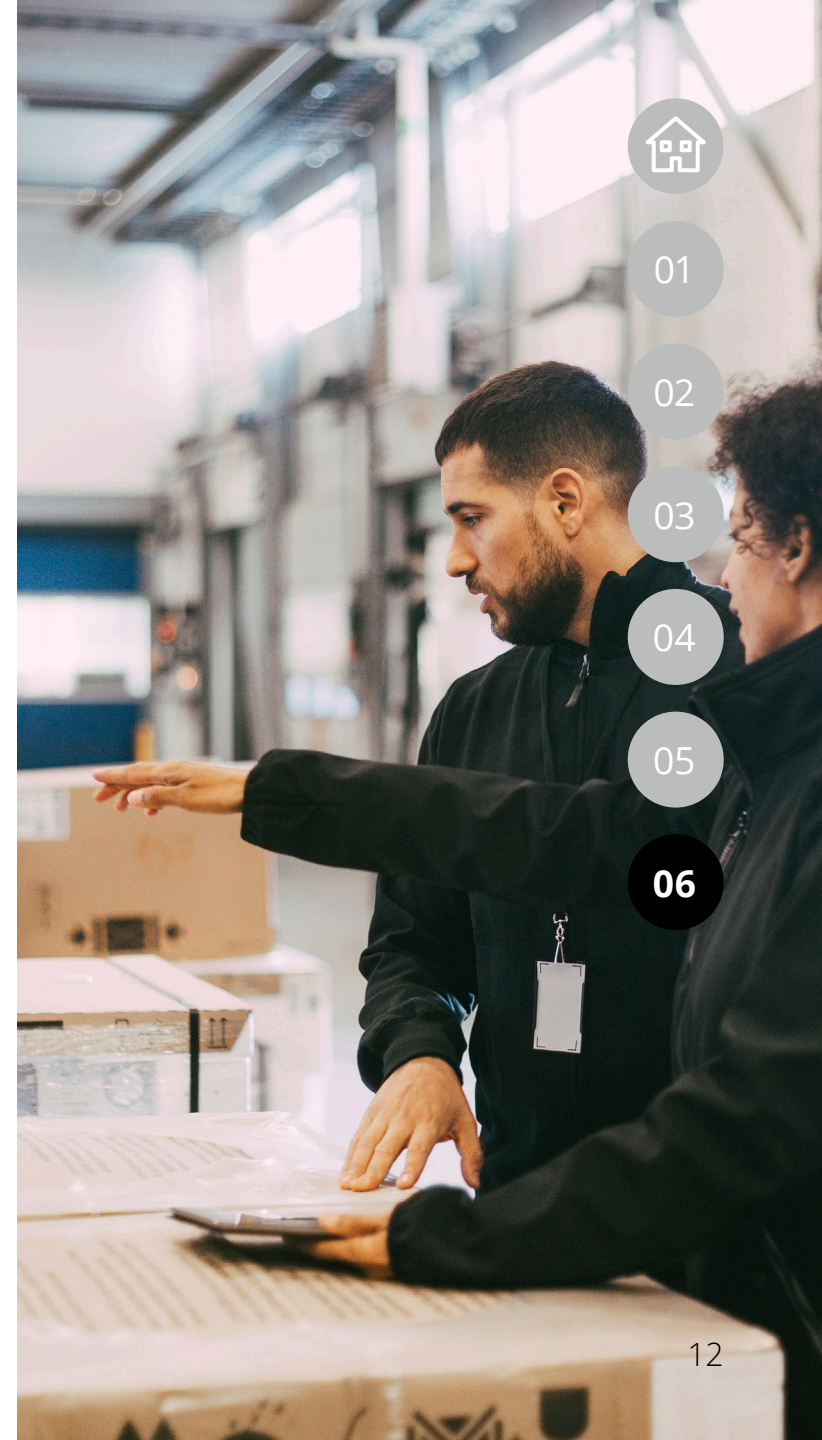
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A journey, not a policy

Activating trustworthy and ethical technology in any organization starts with understanding technology's role in all of our lives and our ability to influence it. But that broad standard typically takes a different form from one organization to another and from one moment to another. While it's tempting to look for concrete, enduring solutions, it's possible the most important qualities an organization can bring to this evolution are agility and patience.

Change takes time. Be patient. Accept missteps as opportunities to learn and adapt. And even as daily experience offers ups and downs, keep the big-picture goal in mind. Creating and using technology in ways that unleash its promise while avoiding its perils—preventing harmful effects that may not be readily apparent, but which can have lasting impacts—is a goal most people can understand implicitly. But it's a practice that will present challenges when you set out to apply it on an institutional scale.

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Beena is executive director of the global Deloitte AI Institute and leads Trustworthy AI & Ethical Tech at Deloitte.

An award-winning senior executive with extensive global experience in AI and digital transformation, spanning across e-commerce, finance, marketing, telecom, retail, software products, services and industrial domains with companies such as GE, HPE, Thomson Reuters, British Telecom, Bank of America, e*trade, and a number of Silicon Valley startups. Beena is also the founder of non-profit, Humans For AI, an organization dedicated to increasing diversity in AI.



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Catherine Bannister is a retired Deloitte managing director. During her time at Deloitte, she was responsible for driving a firmwide strategy around ethical technology and activating Deloitte's commitment to leading and applying techniques to our own technologies, processes, and people, ultimately helping those efforts take root across society. Catherine also led strategic enterprise workforce experience for technology talent at the Deloitte US firms.

Catherine has served in several leadership roles at Deloitte, including US Development & Performance leader, chief talent officer for the US and global Deloitte Consulting technology practices, and member of the Deloitte Foundation board of directors. With more than 25 years of experience with Deloitte, Catherine has developed transformative technology solutions for Health & Human Services agencies in US state governments. Catherine architected of both Deloitte's Tech Fluency program to develop and cultivate breadth and depth of technical capabilities and Tech Savvy program, which enables Deloitte professionals to be conversant in disruptive technologies.

Catherine is a graduate of Loyola University Chicago and Purdue University.



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In her 14 years in consulting, Jessica Sierra has stood up new strategic firm initiatives and supported clients across the health, defense, and intelligence sectors driving technology innovation, secure supply chain, counterintelligence, and business process improvement.

Jessica is currently part of Deloitte's Trustworthy and Ethical Technology program, with a specific focus on bringing tools and resources to Deloitte's employees on how to approach ethical tech decision-making and setting controls for the organization to help activate this behavior.

Prior to her work in ethical tech, Jessica stood up the Executive Women in Tech program to engage, support, develop, and connect C-suite female tech executives. She also helped develop the Diversity & Inclusion in Tech thought leadership series. Throughout her career, Jessica has shown a passion and commitment to diversity and inclusion, and an appreciation for the role technology plays in supporting those values.



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