



MAKING ETHICS PRACTICAL

IN STARTUP SPACES

THE ETHICS MVP FRAMEWORK

Building ethical foundations
from the beginning

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FOREWORD

Having devoted most of my career to supporting entrepreneurial innovation, technology policy, and interdisciplinary collaboration, I have been thrilled to see the development of this Ethics MVP Framework firsthand. It could not come at a more critical time than in the summer of 2020, when our rapidly-changing world has forced us to deeply reexamine our values, actions, and paths forward.

Each entrepreneur's journey requires them to challenge assumptions at every step. In turn, our startup communities have had to continually challenge assumptions about what it means to support and grow successful and sustainable businesses: Is it acceptable to "move fast and break things" in an industry? Can a company build the best products without a diverse and inclusive team? Does a business model have negative externalities we might not be accounting for?

In the same way that attention to UI/UX and human-centered design practices have become nearly ubiquitous in recent years, strong ethics practices are quickly becoming recognized as need-to-haves, not just nice-to-haves. Investors, employees, and customers alike are continuing to raise the bar for what they expect or demand from companies.

Founders face intensifying expectations to build better and more ethical businesses from their inception, but they shouldn't have to do it alone. More than ever, startup support organizations have the opportunity and responsibility to embed values and ethics into their region's entrepreneurial culture, and help guide companies through these often-uncharted waters. For those up to the task, this framework will be a great first step.

Kenny Chen
Co-Founder
Partnership to Advance Responsible Technology

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jessica Pachuta and Dror Yaron spent the past decade with the CREATE Lab at Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute. Considering technology's societal impact - threat and promise - they've been facilitating conversations and collaborating with educators, tech developers and other communities of practice on values-centered tech consideration, development and practice.

Throughout his career as community engagement leader, urban farmer, artist and educator, Yaron has been committed to rebalancing societal power structures by building relationships, and through storytelling.

Pachuta, MBA, filmmaker and organizational culture geek, has been working with youth, educators and community organizations on finding and using their voice to advocate for social justice and progress. She considers entrepreneurship a powerful and influential form of voice.

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OVERVIEW

Ethics MVP (Ethics Minimum Viable Product) is a framework to support entrepreneurs in articulating their values and corresponding ethical business practices at an early stage.

Explicitly and intentionally building ethical thinking into a company's culture and operations from the very beginning can foster stakeholders trust.

In this document, we share our journey in considering this idea, developing this process, and what we learned along the way. We also make available some of the tools and resources we developed in collaboration with startup founders.

We hope this will be helpful in considering ethics in your own specific context.

This guide has 5 parts:

An Overview

Motivation, goals, and working theories of change

The Ethics MVP Framework

Process, strategies and practical ways to apply them

Workshop plans

Adaptable agendas

Participant Resources

Bite-sized ethics content and individual reflection prompts

Appendix

Facilitation tools

**THE ETHICS MVP
PROCESS MAKES
ETHICAL THINKING
ACCESSIBLE
AND TANGIBLE
FOR YOUNG TECH
STARTUPS AND
THEIR FOUNDERS.**

WHY ETHICS MVP?

Technology startup support systems often use the “Lean Startup” method described by Eric Reis. Entrepreneurs aim to build their first “Minimum Viable Product,” or MVP, during an intense phase of learning, iteration and testing. In this phase, founders are building the basics of what they need to get their company off the ground and an efficient product that solves customer needs. They are laying the foundation of their company.

Today’s tech entrepreneurs are increasingly aware of the fundamental role that ethics plays in establishing a viable company. However, practical tools and processes to guide consideration, operationalization and iteration of company ethics are scarce. Considering ethics as a practical procedure and process is essential for engaging in its practice.

Operationalizing ethics during the early stages of a company’s founding will make tech startups more resilient, more responsible, more relatable and more attractive to stakeholders. This framework is designed to support entrepreneurs in communicating strong values AND ethics as part of their Value Proposition.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This framework is designed for accelerators, incubators, co-working spaces, investment firms, and other entrepreneurship support organizations that want to see startups thriving in their communities, and in their portfolios.

It speaks directly to the leaders who are committed to founder learning, and would like to provide their companies practical tools for developing and growing ethical practice.

The logistical implementation is designed to complement existing education experiences that convene a cohort of startup founders. However, we encourage you to hack this resource for your own context.

WHAT IS THE FRAMEWORK?

The Ethics MVP Framework is a process. The following content, activities and ideas are not a checklist, silver bullet, nor a rubber stamp. The authentic practice of ethics is a journey, not a destination.

Ethics MVP is a vital process for young startups and their stakeholders who are committed to creating an ethical business and business ecosystem.

We offer this framework as a stepping stone to creating a more robust foundation for ethical practices and support systems.

THE GOAL is to make ethics practical for new companies and a normalized topic of conversation within the startup community.

Like the rest of a company's products, services and operations, the Ethics MVP will grow into a holistic part of general operating routines. It will look unique in each company.

2020 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This framework documents our 2019 experience and learning in developing this program.

As we all are acutely aware, 2020 ushered in a new, unprecedented reality. What worked in 2019 may no longer be applicable. At the same time, it is more urgent than we could ever have anticipated while creating it.

And so, we release this dated yet relevant snapshot of our 2019 process. Already at work revising content and developing tools for online facilitation, we encourage you to sign up to receive updates at ethicsmvp.com

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This framework comes from the Community Robotics Education and Technology Empowerment (CREATE) Lab at Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute. A unique blend of technologists, artists, educators, entrepreneurs and relationship-builders, CREATE Lab examines what ethical and equitable technology is and collaborates with communities of practice to build tools and processes for that inquiry. This project is an extension of these efforts. We are not ethical philosophers, but practitioners and champions of ethical technology.

In mid-2019, we developed and implemented this framework with a group of brave and gracious founders, cohort members and residents at AlphaLab Gear, a hardware accelerator program of Innovation Works in Pittsburgh, PA.

This project was conceived in the wake of reports about the serious data privacy breaches and unethical practices of Cambridge Analytica, Theranos and others. During this time, public outcry for answers and action resulted in regulations such as The General Data Protection Regulation and the California Consumer Privacy Act CCPR. Tech companies were challenged to craft ethical policies and procedures. Our mission, to examine how ethics can be part of the foundation of tech startups, was born.

EXPECTATIONS

This version of Ethics MVP is the first iteration. As an MVP itself, you can expect it to change, respond to customer needs and be iterated upon. In fact, we welcome your input and your feedback as we continue to develop resources and update this work at

ethicsmvp.com

Inside, you can find resources for facilitation and suggestions for amending your existing programming. It includes guidance and a process for you to contextualize and adapt to your existing programming.

This is intentionally non-prescriptive, because we find that prescriptive guides never work. Change must be constructed.

OUTCOMES

Implementing this framework will yield several pieces of “work product” that facilitators AND participants should document.

Each participant will develop an “Ethics Minimum Viable Product” for their company. It will consist of:

1. A working list of **Values**
2. A cohort-developed, shared set of **minimum criteria** describing best ethical practices and viable ethics communication
3. A practical description of at least one of the founder's **values in action**
4. A **Journey Plan** - describing how founders **plan** to iterate on ethics and **sustain** it as a holistic part of their company's operations

START WITH VALUES

We begin every project by uncovering and expressing our values along with our intention in the work. **We encourage you to do the same, and to express them succinctly with Ethics MVP participants.** Starting with values is essential for success.

We frame values as "This I Believe" and ethics as "This We Practice."

OUR VALUES

1. **Balancing power structures** by engaging with the existing human ecosystems
2. **Transparency and vulnerability** in our practice and process
3. **Objectivity and honesty**
4. **Agility** and **responsivity** to decision, needs and context
5. Ethics is a tool for judging **choices**, not people
6. Honest **communication**
7. **Empowerment** and **Copowerment** means activating power and holding space for it to grow
8. **Equity** means we challenge ourselves to work inclusively, thoughtfully and bravely
9. **Slowness** - slow work yields long term meaningful impact
10. Operating within **contexts** and **values** that already exist when working in the field.

GETTING STARTED - CONTEXT MATTERS

Understand the space, the people, the geopolitical nuances and the stakeholders. Ethics MVP requires the right conditions: your buy-in and your leadership to prioritize ethics, a “work-in-progress” mindset, a willingness to learn, flexibility and responsiveness. These are vital for establishing meaningful, ongoing ethics discourse.

Take what you need from this framework, add to it, grow it, supplement it. Take a values-based approach. Prioritize personal and organizational values into your decision-making. Reference these often with your participants.

Founders need to be willing to communicate, to participate and to be vulnerable. They need to set their own expectations, to commit to doing the thinking and conversation and to be clear about what they want out of the experience.

Enjoy the journey, and we hope you learn something about yourself as well. Get started by thinking about your own context.

★ See Appendix for suggested context mapping activity





THE ETHICS MVP FRAMEWORK

JOURNEY WORK, NOT DESTINATION WORK

The Framework's core activities alternate between individual work and cohort-peer learning (workshops). The journey takes participants from the personal to the operational, progressing through four key units, corresponding with the

Outcomes detailed in the Overview.

1. Purpose and Values
2. Ethics Discovery
3. Values in Practice
4. An Ethical Plan

It offers a menu of options for adding depth at your discretion.

Going through this program will not result in "accomplishing ethics." Similar to the Lean Startup "minimum viable product," founders will develop a basic and viable piece of their company ethics. They will do so by focusing on one personal belief (value), and developing it into a social-contract (ethics).

The Ethics MVP Framework purpose is to support startups in establishing conversations about company ethics and to provide guidance and tools for developing explicit ethical thinking.

An ethics journey is never done, but your program will come to an end. It is expected that the founders participating in your program will continue to develop their ethics on their own, to cover more aspects of practice, and to revise it to reflect learning and growth in an iterative process. This process is designed to set in motion habits that build ethical muscles.

CONSIDERING DEPTH OF IMPLEMENTATION

Consider your context, assets and limitations to determine what level of engagement you will take on. Over time, acknowledge and document ways that you can enrich the Ethics MVP experience.

Ideally, Ethics MVP is seamlessly integrated within your existing programming. We encourage a process that is self-reflective, adaptable, flexible, and most importantly, reasonable and feasible.

The goal is to establish ethics as part of the fabric of your programming, not an afterthought.

ESSENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

Cohort wide

Four workshops to work through the corresponding four key units

DEEPENING THE PROCESS

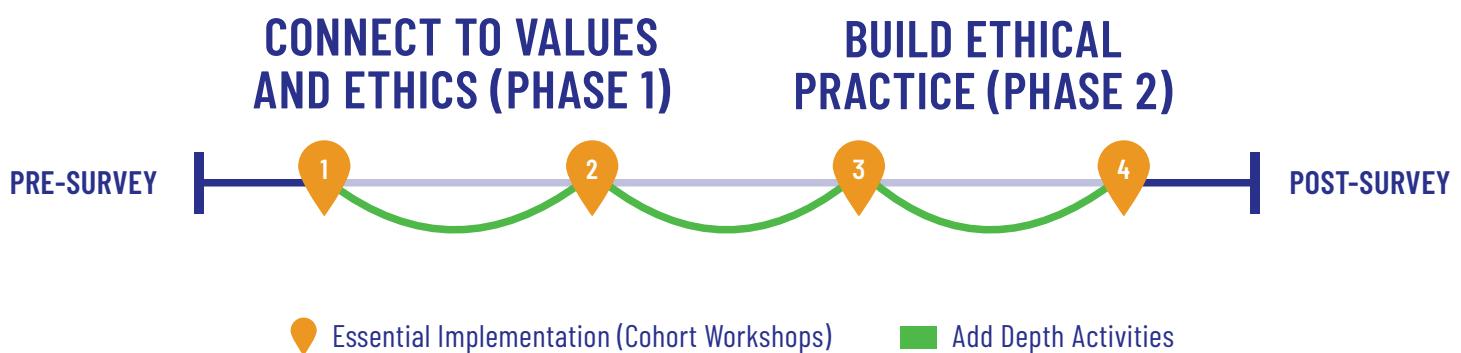
Opt-in experiences

Present opportunities for founders to go deeper, and further develop their ideas

IMPLEMENTING

The process (through the four key units) can be framed in two phases, with two parts each. The first phase (workshops 1 and 2) focuses on building community and language about values and ethics. The second phase (workshops 3 and 4) is action-oriented communicating ethics and developing practice.

Consider this timeline:



Adapt the framework to your program's context and timeline.

See the blank [customizable version](#) of the framework in the Appendix section. Use it to tailor the progression to your existing program schedule, content offerings/anchors and capacity.

In a snapshot of the framework below, each column represents a unit of founder learning that you are facilitating. This first section helps you to imagine how the progression fits into your program (details are provided as an example, to be replaced with your specific timing and content.)

CONNECT TO VALUES AND ETHICS		BUILDING ETHICAL PRACTICE		
	PURPOSE & VALUES "Who am I?"	ETHICS DISCOVERY Practices	VALUES IN PRACTICE Operationalize	AN ETHICAL PLAN Communicate & Repeat
TIMING	Week 1	Week 3	Week 6	Week 9
PROGRAM CONTENT ANCHORS	Orientation	Customer Discovery	Branding	Sales
CONTENT (Match with existing program content)	Defining ethics and values; Understanding the process	Digestible, practical ethics content	Reinforce / go deeper; Connect values + ethics content	Storytelling/ Deliver the Journey Plan

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE:

Each experience builds on the previous one by calling out learning, growth, and a-ha moments.



Origin Stories

In response to each story, the group identifies what they perceive is important to the storyteller, in order to start a working list of values and build community.



Ethics Gallery Crawl

Critique existing industry statements on ethics, to inform cohort shared language, communication quality standards, actionable steps and accountability measures.

The second section gives an overview of the Essential Cohort Experience. See the detailed workshop lesson plans in [Cohort-based Workshops](#).

ESSENTIAL COHORT WORKSHOPS	Origin Stories	Ethics Gallery Crawl	This I Believe - The Soapbox	This We Practice

The third section suggests how to pair additional activities of your choosing (or own construction) with each of the four units of learning.

ADD DEPTH	Engage experts; pair with mentors	Discussion groups; reading content; dive into ethics research	Do this process for other values	Feedback, critique, cohort opportunities to develop tangible action steps

COHORT-BASED WORKSHOPS



This I Believe - The Soapbox
Each founder chooses one personal value to develop into an ethics statement. In a short “manifesto” speech to peers, they share and commit to a relevant action.

This We Practice
Develop concrete and feasible plan for translating personal process to organizational habits and rituals.

ADDING DEPTH

These suggestions for driving deeper inquiry support a responsive approach to founders' needs and interests. As you build a practice, learn what works, iterate on it.

ONE-ON-ONES WITH MENTORS AND/OR PEERS

- Use one-on-one meetings to help participants to set their own benchmarks, with the overall framework progression in mind
- Use the time to focus on asking questions and listening, so that founders can arrive at conclusions themselves
- Affirm what they said by reflecting back what you heard
- Co-develop individualized strategies, ideas and actions they can take to grow and document their learning
- You can use the outline of the prompts (below) as a guide for these as well
- Set weekly or biweekly goals

WRITING PROMPTS / ASSIGNMENTS

- Prompts are included in the [Participant Resources](#) section with guidance for facilitators in the [Appendix](#) (Thinking Deeper)
- They are paired with basic concepts of Ethics MVP
- Can be followed independently; pair well with one on one meetings

STUDY HALL

- Facilitate peer one on ones/small workgroup sessions

CASE STUDIES

- Use current events or source dilemmas from your network, or from the cohort itself
- Use the framework to support group debate and work through the case

CREATING A NETWORK PRESENCE

- Identify and engage stakeholders in your local ecosystem in a conversation on ethics in startup practice
- Consider hosting, or participating in, public events, panels or educational experiences that enrich founders and stakeholder community learning and establish ethics as an ecosystem priority
- Create opportunities for participants to test/present/critique their ethics work with the public or with trusted mentors

DOCUMENTATION

Each workshop will yield evidence of work and thinking, and ideally the following work-product:

1. An origin story
2. An initial list of values
3. Set of group-sourced criteria for an Ethics MVP
4. Evidence of thinking/sense-making about ethics (from discussion notes or prompts)
5. An iterative plan for ethics growth
6. Documents/media/proof of work (photos, interviews, speaking opportunities, etc.)

SURVEYS

Why Survey?

1. Collect baseline data about the founders before the programming and after, to understand impact
2. Signal that your program cares about and prioritizes ethics
3. Understand who the founders are, what they care about and how they communicate it



See the Appendix for survey examples to incorporate into existing pre/post surveys. Consider including adaptations of these in the application process as well.



COHORT-BASED WORKSHOPS

**A STARTUP'S
CULTURE IS A
MANIFESTATION
OF ITS FOUNDER'S
BELIEFS AND VALUES.
ETHICS IS THESE
BELIEFS AND
VALUES IN ACTION.**

01 ORIGIN STORIES



SEQUENCE

This activity is best used as an introduction and ice-breaker early in your program.

Maximum 15 participants recommended

GOALS

Establish a starting point for articulating values - for each individual and for the group
Build a sense of cohort community

OUTCOME

For each founder:
A list of their values, suggested by peers
First draft of their origin story

SPACE

Comfortable seating in a circle, open space, informal (think living room)

MATERIALS

- Large note-taking surface (dry-erase board / large paper sheets), dry-erase or poster markers + eraser
- Camera
- Notebook + pen for each person

WORKSHOP DURATION

Up to two hours, depending on number of founder-participants

PRE-WORKSHOP

Ask participants to prepare to deliver a personal origin story, describing in 2-3 minutes, the life journey that brought them to becoming a founder*
Similarly, facilitators should prepare their own origin story

STEPS / AGENDA

INTRO

15 mins

- Describe why do you / your program consider ethics to be essential from day one
- State the activity goals
- Briefly introduce the Ethics MVP process and timeline
- Discuss a definition of values*
- Describe the activity structure and model it

ACTIVITY

100 mins
or 5 mins (at most)
per participant
/ founder

- Each participant shares their 2-3 minute origin story
- Simultaneously, the participants *actively listen* for values and themes: *What does the storyteller hold important?*
- The group takes 1-2 minutes to share the values and themes they recognized
- Document these for the group
- The storyteller listens, takes notes, and avoids responding
- Save the list for each participant
- Repeat until all participants and facilitators have shared theirs

CONCLUSION

5 mins

- Remind participants of the progression from values to ethics, and connect to upcoming activities

- Direct the participants to take 2-5 minutes to free-write about what they learned through the cohort feedback.

Optional prompts:

- What surprised you?
- How do you feel about the group-suggested themes?
- Are they accurate?

FOLLOW-THROUGH

- Distribute the documented lists to each participant
- Encourage participants to independently develop their own list of values, then choose ONE to further consider in the context of their company

★ Refer to the Appendix for prompts, scripts and suggested iterations

02 ETHICS GALLERY CRAWL



SEQUENCE

Previously, participants started thinking about their values ("This I Believe.") This workshop introduces consideration of ethics statements.

A modification for time is offered in the Appendix.*

GOALS

Develop shared language on the relationship between values (beliefs) and ethics (practices)
Become oriented with industry norms about values/ethics and analyze them
Deconstruct existing statements to consider what an Ethics Statement MVP should include

OUTCOME

Cohort positioning in relation to industry ethics communication practices
Ethics Statement MVP criteria developed by the cohort participants

SPACE

A conference room or comfortable open space

MATERIALS

- Artifacts: Printed ethics examples on large paper (roughly half the number of participants)
- Extra sticky notes 3x3
- Poster markers
- Painter's tape or masking tape
- Large note-taking surface and markers

WORKSHOP DURATION

90 minutes

PRE-WORKSHOP

Prepare topical and relevant examples of ethical statements from existing companies (artifacts)
Ask participants to submit examples
Create a shared folder or otherwise for submissions
Print these on large paper with enlarged print and hang on the walls around the room
Ask participants to bring their list of values from the Origin Stories workshop

Prepare prompts to guide analysis of example statements*

STEPS / AGENDA

INTRO

15 mins

Review ethics content, framing "This We Practice" as the social contract of a business between multiple stakeholders (differentiating from values - "This I Believe"). Describe the activity

ACTIVITY

50 mins

Part 1: 20 mins

Facilitate a "gallery crawl."

Participants "visit" each statement in small groups for 3-5 mins, considering provided prompts and writing comments/questions about each statement on sticky notes

Part 2: 30 mins

When participants have visited all statements or time is up, ask them to review, in their subgroup, the statement and comments in front of them

Each group shares their observations and analysis with cohort

CONCLUSION

20 mins

Allow participants to sit. On a large writing surface, capture likes and dislikes.

Reference the prompts you prepared.

1. Write these in two columns and succinctly capture the responses
2. Ask participants to identify the concepts that will become the Ethics Statement Minimum Viable Product criteria
3. Choose the top "must-haves" by consensus

FOLLOW-THROUGH

5 mins

For the next workshop, ask participants to recall the value that they chose at the Origin Stories workshop (or in further reflection)

Ask them to consider and private write: how does it translate into action, referencing the Ethics MVP criteria developed today.

Offer the remaining time to write today or ask them to prepare it for Workshop #3 - the Soapbox Speech.



Refer to the Appendix for prompts, scripts and suggested iterations



03 THIS I BELIEVE - THE SOAPBOX

SEQUENCE

For this workshop, participants choose one personal value from the list they developed in the Origin Stories workshop. With the Ethics Statement MVP criteria in mind, they communicate it to the cohort, and describe concrete actionable ways that value shows up (or will) in their work.

GOALS

Develop one value into an actionable and observable ethics statement
Notice the thought process for getting from value to action
Brainstorm actionable and practical ways for values and ethics to manifest in policy or behavior

OUTCOME

A statement further developing one value
Group generated ideas and suggestions for an ethics statement based on that value

SPACE

A conference room or comfortable open space for participants to sit

MATERIALS

Sturdy soapbox or other improvised stage on which to stand
Large note-taking surface + markers

WORKSHOP DURATION

60 minutes, depending on number of participants

PRE-WORKSHOP

Ask participants to prepare a 1-minute “Soapbox Speech” about one value that is critical to their business and what it looks like in practice

Additionally, ask for a reflection on what process they noticed in their thinking.

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STEPS / AGENDA

INTRO

10 mins

Facilitate a short energizing icebreaker of your choice

Introduce workshop norms, your own social contract, and ask for suggestions

Briefly revisit the outcomes from the origin stories and goals.

Review the workshop's theme ("This I Believe") and invite participants to deliver their prepared speeches on the soapbox.

ACTIVITY

45 mins

Participants take turns delivering their 1-minute speech. Facilitate a short conversation / group feedback following each speech, paying careful attention to time. Ask for critiques, push on reality, feasibility, etc. Ask about their thinking/work process getting from a value to an action.

CONCLUSION

5 mins

Raise the question for the next workshop: how can the process you used for getting from value to action be operationalized? How do you make it an organizational habit? To wrap up - let participants surface their needs and questions.

FOLLOW-THROUGH

In the next workshop, founders will write their company's Ethics MVP Journey Plan and workshop it with cohort peers. It is a plan that describes how will their company maintain an ongoing conversation about ethical practices, as part of their day to day operation, and in response to growth and other changes.



Refer to the Appendix for prompts, scripts and suggested iterations

04 THIS WE PRACTICE



SEQUENCE

This will let participants workshop their Ethics MVP with each other.

Ask them to bring copies of their Ethics MVP Journey Plan and/or put in a shared digital folder ahead of time. *If asking participants to prepare between sessions is not feasible, see the alternative timing in Appendix.*

GOALS

Deliver an Ethics MVP Plan and workshop it with peers

OUTCOME

Ethics MVP Journey Plan needs to meet the criteria developed by cohort, and include an actionable plan to embed ethics considerations in day to day operation of the company

SPACE

A conference room or comfortable open space for participants to sit

MATERIALS

- Large note-taking surface and markers
- Criteria from Ethics Gallery Crawl / Workshop 2 posted somewhere visible
- Add the terms “actionable” and “adaptable and extendable” to the criteria (if not already mentioned)

WORKSHOP DURATION

75 minutes

PRE-WORKSHOP

Ask participants to deliver their Ethics Minimum Viable Product - including a Journey Plan that describes their values, how they are framing ethics’ role in the company, and communicates HOW ethical work will be procedural. See the script for support.

Ask for hard copies or a version shared in a shared digital folder.

STEPS / AGENDA

INTRO

5 mins

Facilitate a short icebreaker and review the norms

Restate the "This I Believe" and "This We Practice" processes. This workshop is about action and practice.

Define the Journey Plan - a plan to reflect on your company's growth and how your ethical practice is going to grow alongside that.

ACTIVITY

30 mins

1. Ask participants to present their MVPs in small groups of 3-4
2. Refer to the Ethics MVP criteria from Workshop 2 (Gallery Crawl), and use to facilitate the critique and feedback*
3. Pay attention to your timing

Alternative: Writing time at 15 minutes, Workshop in Pairs 15 minutes - [see Appendix](#)

SHARE-OUT

30 mins

Facilitate a group share-out, varying the format based on number of people. Either ask them to read out loud or to summarize what they learned in their small groups.

CONCLUSION

5 mins

What is one small hack that you've found works for you and can recommend for other founders to practice business more ethically?

FOLLOW-THROUGH

5 mins

Private write: What is your ethical commitment to yourself, this cohort, and your company?

★ **Refer to the Appendix for prompts, scripts and suggested iterations**



PARTICIPANT RESOURCES

ETHICS MVP GAUGE

Consider the Ethics MVP Gauge as a metaphor for your ethics journey.

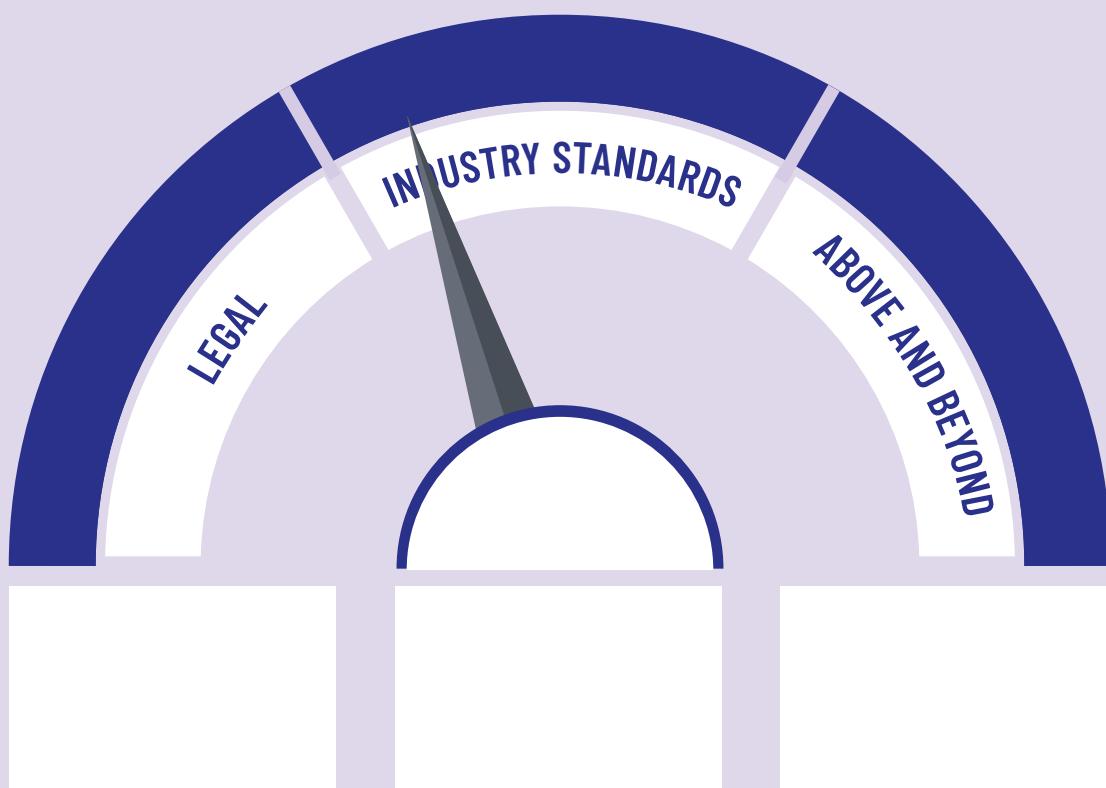
Companies must consider **legal and compliance** for products and operations. Next, they examine what the industry standard is. This could include adhering to professional society norms, the competitive analysis, and what consumers expect from an ethical company. They also could consider product norms, like UI/UX.

The last step is discovering and identifying how they differentiate themselves ethically.

WHICH NEEDLE WILL YOU MOVE?

The Ethics MVP Gauge describes how far a founder can go in a discrete area of practice and identify how they can differentiate their company's ethical practice. This could be implementing safety tools, customizations, features and generally reflects a habit of questioning to arrive at **rational ethical decisions**.

Use the space below each of the three marks on the gauge to describe what you know about one issue, from left to right. In the 3rd box, describe what promise you will uphold to your stakeholders to go "above and beyond" ethically.



THINKING DEEPER PROMPTS + BITE-SIZED CONTENT

PART 1 PURPOSE AND VALUES

ORIGIN STORIES

PROMPTS

What is your purpose for creating this company/product?

Revise your list of personal values.

Which values will resonate in your business?

How might your business demonstrate your values? What do they look like in action?

What benefits and disadvantages might you get from talking about your values with stakeholders?

Challenge yourself to make it normal to talk about values with your stakeholders. Reflect on those conversations.

According to Aristotle, humanity's goal is to pursue excellent character and that actions matter. Consider the role of values in your work.

CONTENT

Values are the embodiment of what an organization stands for and should be the foundation for the behavior of its members. They provide the basis for judgments about what is important for the organization to succeed in its core business.

Values can be explicit (stated), abstract (felt), and assumed (observable). (Schein, 2010)

A person's values derive from their own experiences and reflections, whereas a person's ethics come from whatever group they belong to.

A startup's culture is shaped by its founder's beliefs and is a manifestation of a founder's beliefs and values.

Role of values in your work:

- Know yourself, articulate values
- Onboard and orient your team
- Communicate your company's trustworthiness, and inform your brand identity
- In crisis, you fall back on your values
- Work with people you trust and whose actions and outlook align with your values.

PART 2 ETHICS DISCOVERY

ETHICS GALLERY CRAWL

PROMPTS

How have you previously defined ethics? Has your definition changed? If so, how?

A global trend has big tech companies publishing ethical practices and principles. On your own, find an example and offer an analysis, using the basics of ethics presented here.

What are some ethical issues in your industry?
Make a long list, so that you go deeper than buzz words.
Which of these keep you up at night?

What ethical issues are on your customers' (and stakeholders) minds?

How are your competitors framing ethical challenges, if at all?

What professional ethics exist in your industry?

Start describing, imagining, or detailing what you want this ethics work to yield.

CONTENT

Ethics exists as a tool to create consensus, functions as a social contract that, when explicit, is a codification of your values that describes policy, behavior, expectations, etc. (Hooker, 2018)

About interpersonal values; bring us to rational consensus about how to live and work together.

Is not a way to describe a person or organization as good or bad, but a way to rationally make a decision. Not a way to judge the actions of others. It is determining choices and actions in the face of difficult priorities.

To behave ethically is to behave in a manner that is consistent with what is generally considered to be right or moral (AKA social norms). It builds mutual trust. (Hooker, 2018)

PART 3 VALUES IN PRACTICE

THIS I BELIEVE - THE SOAPBOX

PROMPTS

- Have you experienced a conflict of values?
- Can you imagine a scenario where you are faced with such conflict?
- What are some things you are already doing that are ethical?
- Revisit your list of values. Brainstorm actions that represent or are related to them.
They can range from small ideas to big operational things.
- What values does your technology development and your product promote? How are they in line with the sorts of values that you hold and want to advance in the community of stakeholders?
- What do your values look like when demonstrated?

CONTENT

In Ethics MVP, we frame values as "**This I Believe**" and ethics as "**This We Practice.**"

Conflicts among values in one moral system are unavoidable. There are no measurement units for values that can help reconcile such conflicts. Clearly starting priorities (values) helps to guide decision-making in Values Trade-offs when values are at odds with each other.

Culture is an abstraction; "a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." (Schein, 2010.)

PART 4 AN ETHICAL PLAN

THIS WE PRACTICE

PROMPTS

- How do you measure a decision against your values? Draft a list of 10 or more questions that you (or your team) can use to guide ethical decision-making that is consistent with your values. (i.e. "Does this put customer privacy first?" or "Would I like my family's data on this system?")
- What processes exist in your product development that can support making ethics explicit?
- Make it normal to talk about ethics with your stakeholders. Reflect on those conversations in a short free-write.
- What processes exist in your operations that present an opportunity to revisit and adjust ethics practice, conversations, or reflection?
- How will your ethical work be ongoing?

Vis-a-vis values and ethics: What is your responsibility to this cohort? To your stakeholders? To yourself?

CONTENT

Ethics is a journey, not a destination. It is never done. Explicit and implicit ethics must be adapted to reflect shifting reality and values priority, as well as organizational growth. Ongoing ethics development should be a normal and essential function of any business.

Ethics is not a process separate from each of your business functions. It should be present in your culture and your operations.

Ethics is NOT a "gut feeling, simplistic platitudes, or personal values, with no objective way to resolve issues."

"The heart of ethical reasoning lies in constructing arguments for why one choice is right rather than another." (Hooker, 2018, pps 5-6)

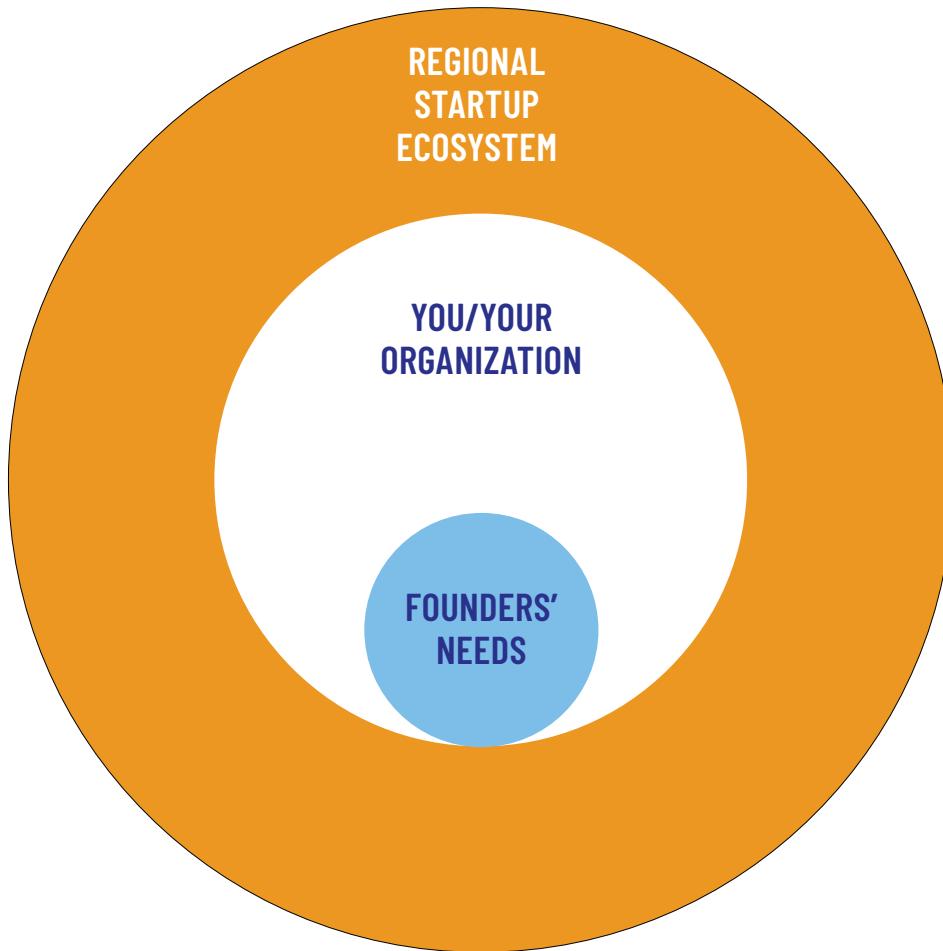


APPENDIX

FACILITATOR RESOURCES



CONTEXT MAPPING



To refresh your understanding of your context, consider the activity of context mapping.

Reproduce the circle above in a large space.

Start with founders' needs and work your way out. Answer, "Who or what shapes these spaces?" while thinking about people, organizations, institutions, government, policy or other forces.

Write directly on it or use post-its to capture and move ideas around.

Use your answers to identify your strengths, potential partners and other champions of your work. Which ones will support you in carrying out Ethics MVP?

AN ETHICAL ECOSYSTEM

In what ways do these entities have the capacity to normalize conversations around ethics in entrepreneurship?

Deepen your experience facilitating ethics conversations by coordinating with experts, researchers, seasoned entrepreneurs, investors, and others to give talks, host panels, and otherwise support. Build relationships with them to enrich your facilitation and the program you implement.

WORKSHOP NORMS/ SOCIAL CONTRACT

Use workshop norms to establish supportive space, allowing sincerity and vulnerability. Workshop norms are a set of rules we agree on and ways that we participate.

Elicit suggestions from participants. Follow with your own, and/or choose from the following:

- a. Expect and accept discomfort
- b. Don't compare work
- c. Work-in-Progress Mentality
- d. Stories Stay, Lessons Leave
- e. Journey work, not destination work
- f. Other suggestions?

FEEDBACK PROTOCOL

Use a feedback protocol for listeners to critique each other's work:

- Clarify - ask question for clarity
- Value - express what is valuable, strong, or demonstrates differentiation
- Curious concern - express concerns, challenges or issues with curiosity
- Suggestions - what ideas were sparked for you where the speaker can take something further?
- How might this be communicated to stakeholders?

01 ORIGIN STORIES NOTES

PRE-WORKSHOP PROMPT

Many great companies have compelling origin stories rooted in real experience. Prepare to deliver your personal founder “origin story,” describing to your peers, in 2-3 minutes, the life journey that brought you to becoming the founder of your current company. Introduce who you are without listing your résumé points.

This is intended for primary active founders/co-founders. You/your teams get to decide who that is. Your team members are encouraged to participate as active listeners and get to know everyone.

Stuck? Try these optional prompts to get ideas flowing:

- What experiences throughout your life shaped the path that led you here?
- What problems/causes were you passionate about throughout your life? Why?
- What common threads, themes, or events in your life have brought you to this?
- What is your “why?” What is your purpose? (How does that show up in your product and/or this company?)

FACILITATION RESOURCES

Enrich

Save time AND set expectations by recording your own origin story. Send your example with the prompt.

To enrich the experience, ask an entrepreneur mentor or advisor to participate and to prepare theirs as a model to lead the activity with. Ideally, this person has demonstrated their values at work in an organization and is a champion for ethics and values.

INTRODUCTION POINTS

Introduce the Ethics MVP process and timeline

Acknowledge that this will be an ongoing process:
journey work, not destination work

Define “Values,” why we start with values, and connect it to a working definition of “Ethics”

Crowd-source a shared definition of values, documenting as you see fit

1. Introduce the active definition of Values as ***This I Believe*** - and their practical significance

Suggest this definition:

- The embodiment of what an organization stands for
- The explicit and implicit abstract ideas that guide behavior
- The basis for judgments about what is important.

2. Set a “why” for starting with values

- Values shape culture, orient teams and marketing, and connect your brand with customers
- In crisis, you fall back on your values
- Values are derived from the shared assumptions about what is important

3. Define Ethics in the program as ***This We Practice***

- Ethics evolve from values, personal and collective
- A social contract of what you DO to align with values, amongst stakeholders
- A rational decision-making process and not a way to judge “good” or “bad” people
- To behave ethically is to behave in a manner that is consistent with what is generally considered to be right or moral

WRAP-UP POINTS

Telling origin stories is a useful practice in storytelling, building identity, establishing a brand and finding an empathic narrative that connects with stakeholders.
Reinforce, if useful:

- Values are the foundation of ethics' function as a social contract;
- This WE practice.
- Organizational values are often a reflection of the founder's values
- Understand your “why” as you embark on the journey

02 ETHICS GALLERY CRAWL NOTES

PRE-WORKSHOP PROMPT

Everyone is talking Ethics.
What does this look like in your field/industry?

Search for an example of an existing company's ethical statement. It is ideally one related to your field, but you may choose otherwise. It can be one that you admire, or not. The goal is to begin deconstructing existing ones, to identify best (and terrible) practices to inform how to construct your own.

Submit it to a shared space, well ahead of meeting time, for others to review.

Notes:

Companies can be of any size, stage, or age
Length of 1 page is ideal, but choose something that is less than three pages, just the executive summary, or an excerpt of your choosing

Some suggested prompts to prepare for your workshop:

- What do you notice?
- What do you have more questions about?
- What is inspiring?
- What are you skeptical of?
- In what ways does it/not make sense?
- General observations from browsing through statements

FACILITATION RESOURCES

Intro to Ethics Content

Ethics = ***This We Practice***

- Ethics exists as a tool to create consensus, functions as a social contract that, when explicit, is a codification of your values that describes policy, behavior, expectations, etc.
- Think of ethics as a social contract of what you DO, amongst stakeholders
- A decision-making process and not a way to judge "good" or "bad" people

Enrich this with visual aids to present frameworks, research or resources you find on your own.

★ See the "Thinking Deeper Prompts +
Bite Sized Content" for more

02 ETHICS GALLERY CRAWL NOTES

INTRODUCTION POINTS

- Describe the goal for their participation - the Ethics Minimum Viable Product. It consists of:
1. A working list of Values
 2. A cohort-developed, shared set of minimum criteria describing best ethical practices and viable ethics communication (that they develop today)
 3. Development of one value, based on the criteria, into actionable practices
 4. Their Ethics MVP Journey Plan - describing how founders plan to iterate on ethics and sustain it as a holistic part of their company's operations

GALLERY CRAWL PROMPTS

- What do you notice?
- What do you have more questions about?
- What is inspiring?
- What are you skeptical of?
- In what ways does it make / not make sense?

CONCLUSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What did we like? What did we not like?
What is useful? What is missing?
Aha moments?
What did we notice about structure?
Do these resonate with "making ethics practical?"

GALLERY CRAWL ALTERNATE ACTIVITY

INTRO

10 mins

Follow the same Pre-Workshop Steps

Prepare some of your own artifacts or statements and crowdsource a mix from the cohort.

Curate these for a variety of perspectives.

Either assign one statement to each participant or ask them to present it to their peers in small working groups.

In addition:

Have enough hard copies printed for small groups OR have them accessible digitally during the workshop.

ACTIVITY

20 mins

Set up small groups of 3-4, according to the number of artifacts you have prepared.

Ask each group to quietly read through the pre-assigned artifacts and discuss. Participants can summarize the statement that they submitted and analyzed.

Reference a set of prompts you prepared (or pull from this guide) to help guide discussion.

SHARE-OUT

20 mins

Ask each group to report out a summary of the artifact with highlights, their take-aways from the conversation, and their conclusions about the efficacy of the statement.

CONCLUSION

10 mins

Resume with the Conclusion and Follow-through as described

03 THIS I BELIEVE - SOAPBOX NOTES

FACILITATION RESOURCES

PRE-WORKSHOP PROMPT

While examining values can be broad and abstract, ethics is concerned with the specific decisions we make.

First:

Pick one value you deeply care about and prioritize, and prepare a one minute speech (about half a typed page) describing what this value looks like in action at your company, in a tangible way.

How will it show up in your product, your practice, and procedures, in small ways or large? Focus on where your company is today or in the near future.

Be prepared to deliver this speech to your peers.

Consider how you saw this communicated (or not) in the Ethics Gallery Crawl.

Review (and if needed, revise) your speech to reflect the Ethics MVP criteria we have developed as a cohort.

Second:

For discussion following your speech, notice your thinking process. Describe how you wrestled with this and what questions you asked yourself.

Optional prompts to help with reflection on your thought process:

- What questions did I start with and which ones did I answer?
- Who did I talk to about it?
- What information did I gather?
- What can I build on in my goal to run an ethical business?
- Fill in the blanks:
This I Believe _____
and WE demonstrate it by _____

- Was it uneasy or uncomfortable? Why?
- What “aha moments” did you experience?

Modify: Depending on the company stage, size, or other variables, you may want to amend the content. To reinforce that ethics is already accessible, though perhaps not explicit, you can ask participants to write about one ethical thing that they are already doing INSTEAD of one aspirational value.

04 THIS WE PRACTICE NOTES

PRE-WORKSHOP PROMPT

For this workshop, ask participants to write the Journey Plan for growing / iterating on their company's Ethics MVP.

Origin Stories grounded us in our purpose as we started to articulate values.

Reviewing ethics statements, we observed that talking about ethics often rings hollow - and is meaningless - if not actionable.

The Soapbox Speech rooted us in thinking about practical manifestation of values.

Now, we will craft the Ethics MVP Journey Plan, describing how your company's ethical practice will grow alongside your business and products.

Recall that your Ethics Minimum Viable Product, at the end of this part of the journey, will consist of:

1. Your Values
2. The MVP criteria developed with your cohort for best ethical practices and communication
3. The development of one value into actionable practices
4. Your Ethics MVP **Journey Plan** - describing how you **plan** to iterate on ethics and **sustain** it as a holistic part of your company's operations

To develop the Journey Plan, consider key elements:

- How #s 1-3 above are sustained and iterated upon
- It is rooted in the reality of how big your company is, what stage it is at right now, and how you need to be responsive to growth and change
- Consider including triggers (when) and mechanisms (who, how) for reviewing and updating company's ethics
- Your plan can be periodical, a specific time like every other month, or linked to specific events or milestones (filing taxes, hiring, project benchmark, etc.)
- Describe, also, what ethical work already exists for you and how you will carry it into formal operations.

Submit this ahead of time, in any medium which suits you, to share with your peers, and prepare to discuss.

THIS WE PRACTICE ALTERNATE ACTIVITY

FACILITATION RESOURCES

This modification includes time for writing, drafting and reviewing in the workshop, rather than in preparation for it. This schedule will yield a rougher draft Journey Plan.

PRE-WORKSHOP PROMPT

Using the same prompt, replace the final line of instructions with the following:

Come prepared to write and share this plan. Bring all of your materials from previous sessions.

WORKSHOP DURATION

60 min

INTRODUCTION

10 min

WRITING TIME

15 min

WORKSHOP IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS

15 min

SHARE-OUT

15 min

CONCLUSION

5 min

FOLLOW-THROUGH

Sharpen this plan, and continue to iterate in order to communicate this plan to stakeholders.

PROMPTS AND BITE-SIZED CONTENT

The "[Thinking Deeper Prompts and Content](#)" in the participant resources section are intended to supplement the **four** key workshops of the Ethics MVP Framework. They are designed to support and deepen founders' inquiry and the delivery of an Ethics MVP plan.

Similarly, you may find a review of that content helpful in your facilitation.

Participants may use these to private write or journal, to guide discussion in one-on-one meetings with a mentor, in small peer groups, or otherwise. Likewise, they may choose to keep this to track their growth over time.

Participants should choose which ones make sense for them.



SURVEY

PRE-SURVEY

1. Free write - short answer: What are three important goals for you in the program/cohort?

1

2

3

2. Rate the importance of the following from 1 to 5 (1=lowest, 5=highest):

a. Customers' needs _____

b. Fundraising _____

c. Trusting myself _____

d. Social Responsibility _____

3. If your company is successful, what impact does that have for your customers?

4. Please explain the role of ethical thinking in a startup.

SURVEY

POST-SURVEY

1. Free write - short answer: What were the three important goals for you in the program/cohort?

1

2

3

2. If your company is successful, what impact does that have for your customers?

3. Please explain the role of ethical thinking in a startup and if it has changed after your experience in the program.

4. Rate the importance of the following from 1 to 5 (1=lowest, 5=highest):

- a. Customers' needs _____
- b. Fundraising _____
- c. Trusting myself _____
- d. Social Responsibility _____

ETHICS MVP FRAMEWORK - CUSTOMIZABLE

CONNECT TO VALUES AND ETHICS		BUILD ETHICAL PRACTICE		
	PURPOSE & VALUES "Who am I?"	ETHICS DISCOVERY Practices	VALUES IN PRACTICE Operationalize	AN ETHICAL PLAN Communicate & Repeat
TIMING				
PROGRAM CONTENT ANCHORS				
CONTENT (Match with existing program content)				
ESSENTIAL COHORT WORKSHOPS				
FEASIBLE OUTCOME				
STRETCH GOAL				
ADD DEPTH				
RELATED CONTENT				
PROMPTS				
NORMALIZE Facilitation practices across program activities				

