



Facial recognition: a risk?

Format 120-minute workshop with Cubera Solutions AG

Location Office of Cubera Solutions AG, Feldmeilen

Output

- Mapping of ethical risk zones and values arising from facial recognition technologies
- Analysis of ethical risk zones and the responsibility chain for facial recognition technologies
- Discussion of possible solutions using Ethical Product Design
- Mapping of the discussion for future orientation

Follow-up

- Development of a value compass “Our Values”
- Mapping of positively and negatively influenced stakeholders
- Anticipation of ethical challenges, strategic consulting, communication planning
- Preparation of a training programme and information material for customers

“The exciting workshop helped us evaluate and question our products using ethical principles. We explored how we as a technology company approach solutions and which products we would like to develop or not develop.”

Michael Fretz, co-founder and head of design at Cubera.

The possibility of automated facial recognition poses far-reaching ethical risks to individuals, companies, and society as a whole. Can the positive applications outweigh these risks?

Cubera Solutions AG is a digital agency specialising in web and mobile applications. However, it also spends a significant part of its efforts on research and the development of new technologies. This includes virtual and augmented reality applications, which Cubera already includes in many projects today. The company also experiments with machine learning and computer vision.

Cubera is known in Switzerland for its products featuring facial and people recognition. For co-founder Michael Fretz, the goal is to explore positive applications of this technology and to demonstrate that facial recognition does not necessarily lead to dystopic scenarios and societies.

“Thanks to the workshop with ethix, we were able to check whether and how our values match our actions. We worked together to develop possible solutions that we could adopt in the event of disagreement. In the future, this will enable us to ensure that we take full responsibility for the client and the people affected by the product within our sphere of influence.”

Franziska Wälti, interaction designer

“The ethix workshop showed me shortcomings in ethics and safety that I would not have thought of. It broadened my understanding of the problem and helped me recognize and acknowledge my share of this responsibility.”

David Hogg, intern

Mapping of ethical questions

On the basis of the **Ethical Product Canvas**, ethical risk zones of facial recognition technology were analyzed. The participants individually examined a specific product situation (facial recognition in a company-internal context, as well as in the service, health, and safety sectors) and identified specific risk zones. This delivered a first collection of attitudes and assessments within the company.

Subsequently, these risk zones were compared with specific affected values in a group discussion where concrete solutions were discussed. The key issue was the balance between the value of **privacy** and the value of **security**, which is particularly relevant for facial recognition. In addition, questions of digital self-determination and individual freedom as well as questions of health and the quality of life were raised.

After the workshop, the discussion was structured by ethix and converted into a concise mapping and delivered to Cubera as a written output.

Analysis of responsibility

The question of responsibility was specifically discussed within the framework of the Ethical Product Canvas. Manufacturers of facial recognition software hold a special responsibility in the selection, consulting, and training of potential customers. In principle, companies can only be held responsible for things that are within their sphere of influence. However, it is important to apply the **principle of due diligence** and to define the limits of responsibility.

We debated how the **chain of responsibility** (employee–company–customer–user–society–political system) works. As part of the specifically discussed approaches, individual strategies were already considered in order to take on this responsibility (for example with explicit training in dealing with sensitive customer data).

Follow-up

- Development of a **value compass** “Our Values”: This brings more clarity about one’s own profile and helps to align one’s communication with these values. It also helps potential employees, customers, and investors to see if there is a match.
- **Mapping of positively and negatively influenced stakeholders**: In order to develop tangible strategies, it is necessary to identify the specific stakeholders (industries, people, social fields) that are positively or negatively affected by facial recognition (or any other technology used).
- **Anticipation of ethical challenges**, strategic consulting, communication planning: What has been learned so far can be used to shape one’s own (product) strategy according to ethical principles and subsequently adapt communication. It is also possible to strategically shape and use the ethical focus as a competitive advantage.
- Design a prototype **training program** for customers: A document showing measures to raise specific customer awareness of identified ethical risk zones and to present concrete solutions.

ethix – Lab for Innovation Ethics is made possible by Engagement Migros, the development fund of the Migros Group.

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About Engagement Migros

Engagement Migros supports pioneering projects in the midst of social change that break new ground and test future-oriented solutions. The impact-oriented funding approach combines financial support with coaching-like services in the pioneer lab. The development fund was founded in 2012 as a voluntary commitment by the companies of the Migros Group. With its independent approach, Engagement Migros supplements the funding activities of the Migros Culture Percentage.

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