

**Adobe: Ethics Analysis**

Marlee Yerkes

Department of Management, Texas State University

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Professor Dennis Rose

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## **Introduction**

Adobe is a well-established company in the computer software industry. Adobe is known for its' innovative ethical actions, especially regarding environmental sustainability. This company understands that being ethical is not a "one and done" thing. It requires committing to ethical actions and practices, measuring your progress, and making room for continuous improvement. The company's acts of ethics include triggering events that have led to acts of ethics on behalf of Adobe, goal setting, and how the company implements benchmarking. Adobe also possesses many ethical practices including committees, assessments & diversification, and innovation & giving back. The company also creates social capital with its' impacts towards the community and youth, which had created goodwill and appeal to stakeholders. In this paper we will further discuss Adobe's Acts of Ethics, Ethical Practices, and Social Capital.

## **Acts of Ethics**

Adobe is in the computer software industry, and one of its many core competencies is their design software and products. Adobe is headquartered in San Jose, California. The headquarters possesses offices for 2,300 employees, enclosed parking, cafeteria, server rooms, a customer experience center, training, conference, and fitness facilities (ABI/Inform Global, 2014). The San Jose location consists of three main towers: East, West, and Almaden Towers. The towers are between 16 and 18 floors tall and include 989,000 square feet (92,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of rentable area with 938,000 square feet (86,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of parking (Emerald Insights, 2014). As you can see, Adobe has a lot of amenities, which in turn uses a lot of energy. The following sections will discuss events that have led to acts of ethics on behalf of Adobe, the goals the company sets, and how the company implements benchmarking.

## **Cause and Effect**

An example of events that caused ethical acts on the behalf of Adobe would be the California Electricity crisis of 2001. Adobe was affected with rolling blackouts to its facilities. In response to this, Adobe created a conservation program. This program would not only establish Adobe as environmentally responsible, but it would also help manage further energy shortages. The conservation program set a goal to reducing energy consumption by 10 percent at their San Jose location. This would then develop into a concerted sustainability effort at all properties worldwide. Adobe has received positive media coverage around their sustainability efforts ([4] Clean Technical, 2010; [11] Knox, 2011; [14] *The Inspired Economist*, 2006) highlighting some of the achievements. (ABI/Inform Global, 2014). Adobe was able to turn a crisis into an innovative way to operated cleaner and more efficiently. Adobe continues to strive to create acts of ethics, especially towards environmental sustainability. This can be seen in Adobe goal setting in the following section.

## **Setting Goals**

As discussed earlier, Adobe's focus in acts of ethics is towards reducing its' impact towards the environment. A statistic highlighted in the company's CSR report for 2018 shows that, while Adobe's revenue grew by 24 percent and its workforce grew by 19 percent, Adobe

reduced its carbon emissions by 25 percent per employee (Taylor, 2020). By decoupling emissions from business growth, Adobe has grown its business while using fewer resources to accomplish it (Taylor, 2020). Adobe has set a goal to run on 100 percent renewable energy by 2035, and most recently announced an expansion of its global headquarters in San Jose, California, USA, with a new building running fully on clean, renewable energy-one of the first of its kind in Silicon Valley (Taylor, 2020). Adobe is a great example of a company that uses less resources as it grows to become ethically responsible regarding environmental preservation and sustainability. Adobe also utilizes a goal setting method to continue elevating their ethical practices. Adobe is constantly trying to improve itself to become better. This company understands that acts of ethics is not a “one and done” thing. It requires committing to ethical practices, measuring your progress, and making room for continuous improvement. The following section will discuss how Adobe measures their progress or need for improvement.

## **Benchmarking**

To determine the progress and need for improvement of energy innovations, Adobe uses performance benchmarking. This involves comparing their performance to other standards in the industry. For this purpose, the company participates in Energy Star, the energy performance rating system developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") and the US Department of Energy ("DOE") (ABI/Inform Global, 2014). These two benchmarking methods help Adobe see where they have improved, and where there needs to be more improvement. Adobe is also committed to running its business and operations sustainably, which includes operational excellence, addressing renewable energy as a business imperative, embracing a culture of sustainability, making a global impact by starting with communities, and achieving more through collaboration (Taylor, 2020). The company is also committed to enabling customers to reach their own sustainability goals (Taylor, 2020). The following section will discuss ethical practices taken by Adobe more in depth; including: Committees, Assessments & Diversification, and Innovation & Giving Back.

## **Ethical Practices**

Almost all of Adobe's products and services are in some way related to AI. With AI there are many benefits, but there are also risks involved. Many studies have found that AI can be bias, sexist, and discriminate amongst other things. This is because AI is programmed based on past knowledge. Adobe has developed a practice in response to these risks. The company found that review boards can help reduce some of the risks associated with using artificial intelligence, according to Adobe Inc. executive Dana Rao (ABI/Inform Global, 2021). The following sections will discuss ethical practices taken by Adobe more in depth.

## **Committees**

Adobe developed an ethical practice called Adobe's AI ethics committee, which launched in 2019. The committee is used to review new features for potential bias before those features are deployed, Mr. Rao said Wednesday at The Wall Street Journal's Risk & Compliance Forum (ABI/Inform Global, 2021). The committee is made up of employees of various ethnicities and genders from different parts of the company, including legal, government relations and

marketing; getting a diverse group of people together can help identify issues product developers might miss (ABI/Inform Global, 2021). Adobe's ability to continuously adapt to make room for improvement can be seen in the example above. To this day, the company creates innovative practice the help minimized risks and unethical practices.

### **Assessments & Diversification**

As stated previously, AI is known to discriminate again gender, age, and demographic. This is because AI is programmed based on past knowledge. This can also be seen with imaging AI filters, "because it affected only people with Black skin or their hair specifically and no one else would have gotten the issue." (ABI/Inform Global, 2021). A practice Adobe developed to help eliminate this issue is by implementing AI ethics assessments. The assessment identifies which features Adobe's ethics committee should review. Adobe also made sure that the review board to be made up of diverse voices to help eliminate these issues along with bias. Having a diverse group of people may allow for someone else to catch something that maybe you wouldn't have noticed. This is yet again another example of how Adobe strives to continuously improve itself regarding ethics and the triple bottom line.

### **Innovation & Giving Back**

Adobe prides itself with bringing innovation not only to software, but also to the community. The company invests in its employees' and partners' best ideas for solving social problems and creating positive change (Taylor, 2020). An example of this is Adobe's Adobe Pro Bono Residency Program. In this program, employees lend their design, marketing, technology, and other expertise to nonprofit clients to address critical social issues, while developing their expertise and leadership skills in a new environment (Taylor, 2020). Another example is The Adobe Employee Community Fund. This is an employee-driven grantmaking program that supports organizations addressing challenges in the communities where Adobe employees live and work (Taylor, 2020). Each year, employees vote on the most pressing social and environmental issues in their communities to determine grant selections (Taylor, 2020). With Adobe's Matching Grants Program, Adobe supports the causes employees care about. This includes supporting charitable organizations through volunteer service or donations. Adobe also doubles the impact of its generosity by matching all full-time employees' donations of cash, securities, or time, up to \$10,000 per calendar year (Taylor, 2020). See Appendix A for more information. Adobe not only takes ethical actions towards environmental sustainability, but the company also creates innovative practice the help minimized risks and unethical practices. It doesn't just end there, Adobe also gives back to their employees, partners, and the community. All these thing increases Adobe's social capital which will be further discussed in the following section.

### **Social capital**

Adobe is known for its innovation of technology, defining what is possible for design and creativity. The company frequently tops best lists for leadership in Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG), including Dow Jones Sustainability Indices, Fortune's 100 Best

Companies to Work For, CDP Climate A List, and Forbes Most Just Companies (Studio Rainwater, 2022). Adobe's recognition has led to an increase in social capital for the company. As a result, Adobe's design system feels authentic, exciting, and clearly connected to the brand's core visual identity (Studio Rainwater, 2022). This design includes resources for nonprofits, pro-bono partnerships, and community investing as well as an employee giving portal and support for employee volunteer work (Studio Rainwater, 2022). Adobe has created innovative ethical actions and practices that have impacted employees, partners, youth, the environment, and the community, which in turn increased social capital for the company. The following sections will discuss this more in-depth.

## **Community Impact & More**

Adobe provides people of all ages and backgrounds with grants, product access, and educational opportunities so they can tell their stories, express themselves, and build great careers (Adobe, 2022). The company empowers their employees to get involved in their local communities and build partnerships that make life better in all the places. Adobe also celebrates Changemakers — Adobe customers who use our products to create experiences that address critical social needs, preserve the health of our planet, and help people with valuable skills succeed (Adobe, 2022). The company supports a healthy and sustainable environment in every area of their business, from their products and buildings to our policies and partnerships (Adobe, 2022). Adobe not only creates social capital with its' ethical actions and practices, but the company also increases social capital with its' partners. Adobe recognizes and partners with company's or celebrities who use their products/services to make a difference regarding the triple bottom line. An example of this is Adobe's partnership with Ben & Jerry's and Billie Eilish. Having established partners like these increases Adobe's credibility and thus its social capital. This can also be appealing to stakeholders as it established goodwill within the company.

## **Affecting Youth**

Adobe is proud to play a role in preparing young people for the future by nurturing creativity and supporting creators. The company's stance is that "creative literacy" will be a key skill in the future, and that art, creativity, and technology must be central in education (Taylor, 2020). In addition, Adobe believes that all students should have access to these opportunities, regardless of their background or circumstances. Adobe also has a program called The Adobe Digital Academy. It is a modern apprenticeship program that provides an alternative and accelerated pathway into the tech industry for career-switchers from diverse backgrounds (Taylor, 2020). Adobe also offers many other programs that support the development of creative and digital skills for youth. Adobe's commitment to helping future generations increases social capital and therefore goodwill which is appealing to stakeholders. Having a sense of credibility and trust with stakeholders is crucial. Adobe has created many actions and practices to increase social capital in order to make stakeholders feel they can trust Adobe and view the company as credible. Adobe's care for employees, partners, youth, the environment, and the community make it a company that people view as ethical, trustworthy, credible, and genuine.

## **Conclusion**

Adobe not only takes ethical actions towards environmental sustainability, but the company also creates innovative practice the help minimized risks and unethical practices. It doesn't just end there, Adobe also gives back to their employees, partners, youth, the environment, and the community. This company understands that being ethical is not a "one and done" thing. It requires committing to ethical actions and practices, measuring your progress, and making room for continuous improvement. This paper discussed Adobe's Acts of Ethics, Ethical Practices, and Social Capital. The company's acts of ethics include triggering events that have led to acts of ethics on behalf of Adobe, goal setting, and how the company implements benchmarking. Adobe also possesses many ethical practices including committees, assessments & diversification, and innovation & giving back. The company also creates social capital with its' impacts towards the community and youth, which created goodwill and appeal to stakeholders. Adobe's ability to continuously adapt to make room for improvement makes it a company that stands out from the crowd. To this day, the company creates innovative practice the help minimized risks and unethical practices. In the end, Adobe is a company that strives to continuously improve itself, especially regarding ethics and the triple bottom line.

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# Appendix A: Adobe Employee Community Fund

2021 GRANTEES

## Adobe Employee Community Fund

**\$5,000,000** in global community investment  
through 250 grants



(Studio Rainwater, 2022)