

# Pursuit of Responsible Strategy - Presenter Notes

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## Intro

Technology can clearly be used in both extremely helpful and unhelpful ways. Today's presentation is about my on going thoughts what it takes to develop strategy that is responsible.

Outline:

- analytics
- strategy
- ethics
- what can we do?

## Analytics

- analytics helps us peer into the future, or understand the past, by finding **meaningful patterns in discovered data**
  - we use models of the world - simplified versions of reality to help us navigate uncertainty and complexity that surrounds us

## Wonders of Analytics

- at g2v we're working with plant information from what are called hyperspectral sensors, outside human vision
  - using data engineering and machine learning, we're in the process of
    - early detection of stress within plants
    - mapping stress to causes of stress
  - in our product development, google helped us immediately share our new product
    - their models helped us to get feedback from a global audience by search keywords
- google deep learning; protein folding problem
  - using machine learning
  - humanity has achieved breakthroughs in our fundamental understanding of protein folding in biology
  - which could big implications to prevent pandemics and diseases

## Building Models

- for our models of the world to work, we need to narrow the scope of what our models can see
- analytics is powerful because it is narrow and specialized - but therein lies the problem
- analytics only knows as much as its creator frames the problem well, and gives the right data
  - analytics will be just as ignorant as the creator, just as wise as the creator
- analytics gets placed into the meaning making of the creator
  - and can clearly be used for both benefit and harm

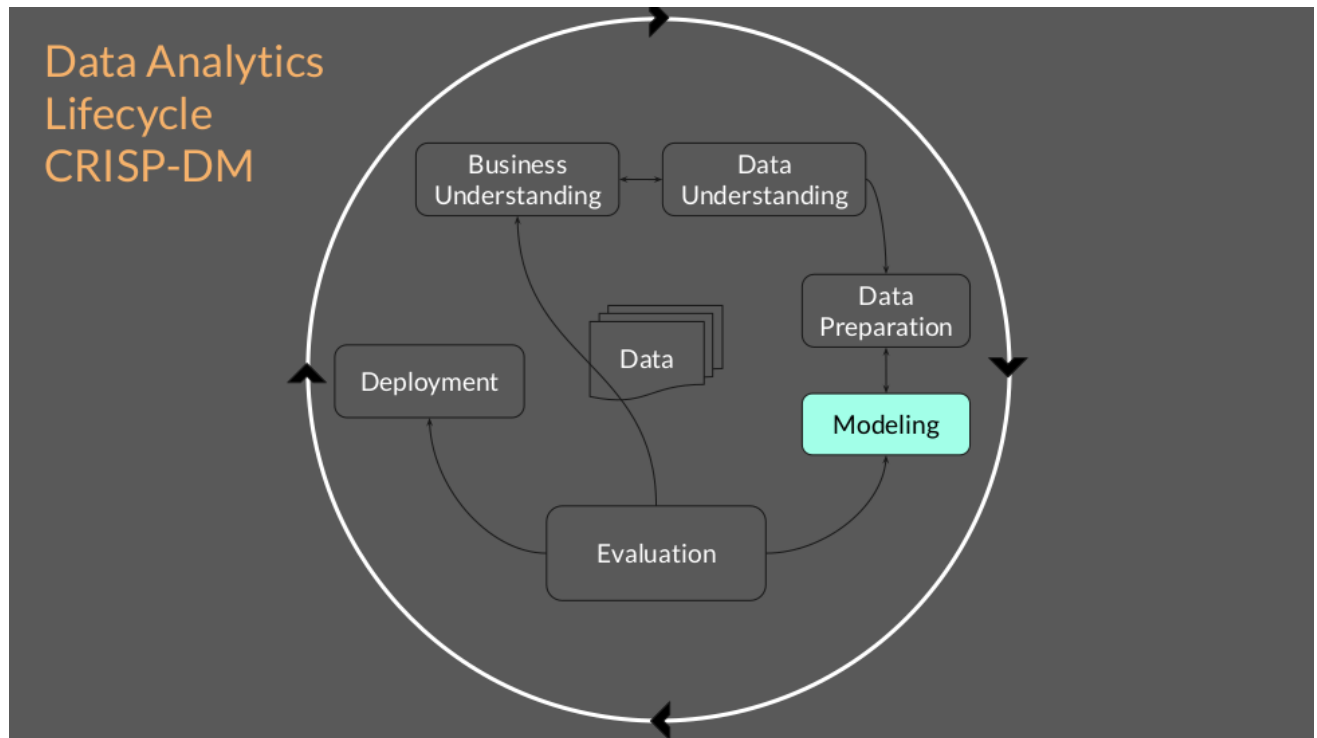
"Models are opinions embedded in mathematics. Cathy O'Neil"

## Dangers of Analytics

- the danger so often with analytics is the business model and incentives around it
  - the scaled business model will eventually collide into society / the planet
- an example is that facebook started as a fun way to connect university students together

- and now has changed it into a large scale behavior prediction and modification machine
- analytics has provided facebook with a way to digitally extract human experience at scale
  - the model builds a specific version of reality that it thinks will resonate with you
- it's not the model's fault that this is dangerous
  - it's the intentions of the creator, and the consequences of the business model that is dangerous
- analytics coupled with an extractive business model can lie at the core of threats to
  - our privacy
  - our democracy
  - and ironically our ability to connect with one another

## Data Analytics Lifecycle



- crisp-dm, the most common data analytics lifecycle you will find
- this lifecycle acknowledges that the modeling of data, always needs context and follow up
  - all the steps are critical for successful deployment of analytics
- modeling is clearly is only one part of the picture
  - how you do the rest of the cycle vastly affect the outcomes of analytics
- this really suggests that much of the outcome of analytics is dependent on
  - how the creator understands, prepares, and evaluates the analytics
  - what they care about and value will change the outcomes
- I'd like to propose getting a step closer to what I call responsible strategy
  - life / humane understanding along with business understanding
  - our models are so powerful that we need to understand their effects at larger frames

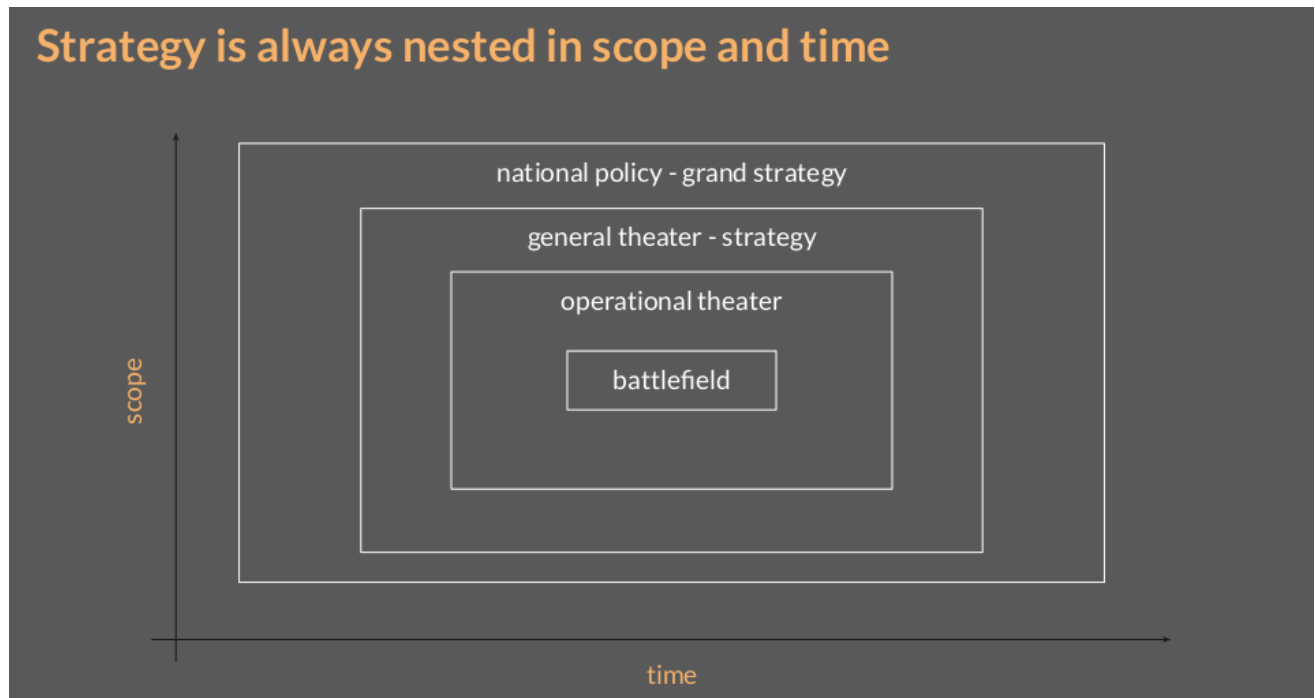
## Strategy

### Definition

- in its simplest form, I see strategy as picking best path from a to b
  - you're trying pushing back ignorance, being surrounded by uncertainty
- what are all that pros and cons different paths, all the different obstacles to b?
  - strategy is a question of how to learn as much helpful parts in some field
    - and how it works to reduce the risk of the journey

- it's a set of tools to help us from being overwhelmed

## Strategy in Scope and Time



- strategy helps us keep track of threats and opportunities in larger frames and longer time
  - in a battle, you can be at a serious disadvantage if you don't keep track of how other battles may affect your position
  - even then - which battlefront? the physical one? the digital one? what about winning the hearts and minds of the enemy?
  - even the best strategy though is informed by - why are we even in the war in the first place? what is the grand strategy, set by our national policy goals?
- with strategic thinking, we're trying to effectively our shift attention from one frame to another, without losing the plot
  - what opportunities and threats come from each frame? how important are each?
- however our attention is limited. how do we balance all this?

## Strategy as an Emergent Process as an Ongoing Process

No plan of operations reaches with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main force. Helmuth Von Moltke, 1880

- new information from the battlefield is always streaming in from the different frames
  - we're constantly shifting operational priorities, but also checking back in with our ultimate purpose
- strategy, you are learning as you go, you don't just create one plan
  - even if you get from A to B successfully
  - your strategy needs to reform because the journey doesn't end at B
- it is critical to keep a strategic reserve for scanning the horizon
  - you will always be pressured to attend to the operational
  - but your biggest risks come from outside your normal operational view, in your field ignorance
- also incredibly important to build the skill of finding, and reorienting to your purpose, your north star
  - in an ongoing fashion, being able to communicate your story with others in order to work together
    - tending to the emotional / motivational connection to the story
  - reorientation is critical because there will always be setbacks, and a need for resilience and perseverance

## Example - Strategy at Work

- at g2v we want to be able to better the world with data and light
  - first, it's important to ask - is indoor farming tech actually beneficial for the world?
  - second, we've chosen a typical economic scaling path as a startup
  - we will lose more and more control of our vision, especially if we can't prove a good business model and revenue
    - so we try to find products which align with our vision, but also provide recurring revenue
- we ruthlessly tackle the riskiest assumptions first
  - the riskiest part in the beginning was whether growers and businesses would even see value and pay for an idea like this
    - the biggest risk wasn't whether we could build it or not; we knew this was possible from the science
  - this involved getting a bunch of engineers putting on their selling hats for 3 months, instead of putting on our building hats
    - we managed to prove there was an initial receptive market
      - which helped justify pouring more resources into building and assessing the technical risk.
- we're always looking at how to accelerate our learning rate
  - how can we leverage the learning of others to help us in our journey?

## Example - Strategy in Surveillance Capitalism

- what if your north star was...shareholder return, at whatever costs is barely legal - or not even legislated yet?
- facebook strategy within surveillance capitalism - economic logic hijacking of technology
  - incursion
    - capture as much data through as intrusive means as politically possible
  - habituation
    - ubiquitous incursion - in time and in scope - stick to the message?
  - adaptation
    - resist regulation through capture of the political process
    - reduce corporate risk through adapting the system of rules
  - redirection
    - give people personal value, while not realizing what they give away as a group
      - the real outcome happens at a macroeconomic level, which interacts heavily with society
    - take away attention from the adaptation, continue to extract
      - example: the problems of corporate social responsibility
        - focusing on one frame can occlude vision of the larger frame
        - spend an enormous amount of money, time, and energy signalling to the world how socially responsible they are
        - the hard questions of our time involve how we structure our economies, how we save our faltering democracies, how we tackle power structures and inequality
          - to many corporations, the answers to those questions are an existential threat
            - for example, anti-trust action against big tech

## How do we pursue responsibility strategy?

- we've seen strategy can help our learning - but we aren't necessarily closer to being more responsible, more wise
- in this continuum from data to wisdom
  - data information knowledge understanding wisdom
  - I think that analytics and strategy can greatly enhance our knowledge and understanding
    - but to push further into wisdom and responsible strategy
    - I think requires a different learning tool involving human judgment
    - one that can evaluate the qualities and motives of the creator

- ethics, I believe, is the tool that can help us choose the path of responsible strategy and analytics

## Ethics

### Definition

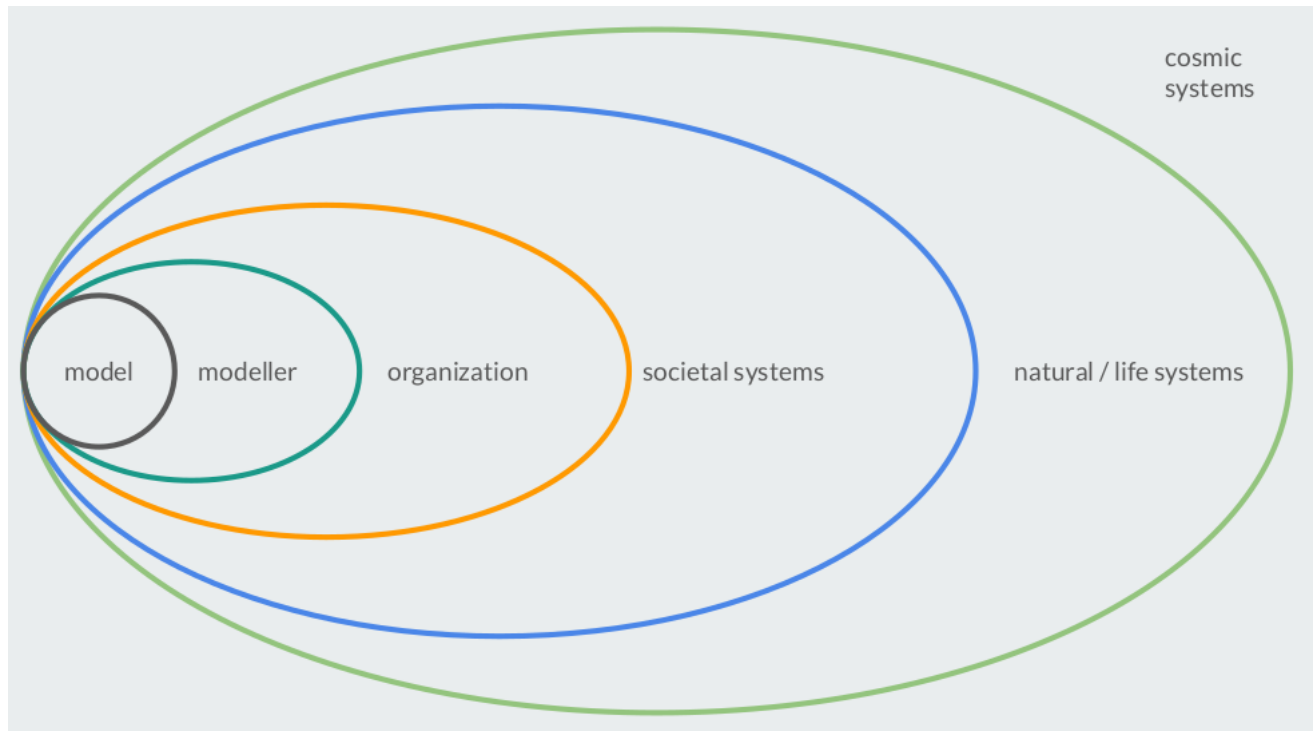
"ethics is the ongoing study, development, and application of moral reasoning"

- ethics is the process of discovering what's right / wrong / just / unjust?
  - despite your best intentions, how do you know you're doing more harm than good?
    - we need to answer this in both time and scope
      - scope: its far easier to consider ethics for 1 person, vs 7 billion people
      - time: caring for the next 5 minutes vs next 5 centuries

### Ethics vs Strategy

- in my own simple terms, I think ethics and strategy are similar in that we are
  - weighing harms and benefits on different frames
  - continually re-evaluating on new information from larger frames
- but have some key differences like
  - considering questions of morality / suffering / injustice
  - inevitably this starts asking questions about the values of the strategist
  - what does the creator care about? where do they draw their lines of caring? what are they able to care about?

### Ethics and Extending Lines of Caring



- I like thinking about ethics as the process of drawing care lines larger and larger
  - character: where do we INTEND to draw our lines of caring
  - conduct: where does our care EXTEND to in practice?
- considering larger frames gets harder and harder to do because there are conflicts between the frames
  - but its not impossible either
- example. in a corporation, do we stop caring once we've satisfied shareholder value?
  - or is there a moral case to look at our strategy's impact on society, and planetary systems?

- it can be easy, especially in a privileged position, to ignore conflict if you don't care about it
- it's not the strategy, or analytical model itself that is unethical
  - it's how the strategist understands or misunderstands
    - the use of the model in the context it sits in
  - if the strategist is ignorant of, or doesn't care about the larger frames
    - the more risk is posed from 'externalities' of their thinking

## "Externalities"

- while there are many examples of personal conflicts (see the extra slides in this presentation)
  - I want to focus on some of the content brought up by Shoshana Zuboff in Surveillance Capitalism
- there is a term out there called "externalities"
  - most memorable case for me is that, most macroeconomic models not considering the warming of our planet in its calculations
  - Zuboff goes to some lengths to show how big technology corporations have grown so powerful that they harm social, human, life, and planetary systems, for the benefit of shareholder value
- ethical conflict
  - benefits
    - google and facebook provide a powerful and unique connection to certain types of invaluable informational stores of culture.
    - it also acts as a second brain for us, enabling innovation, accessibility of knowledge
  - harms
    - yet the business model it runs on, and the algorithms that feed us info, are accelerating civilization level threats
    - a particularly insidious consequence is the erosion of our ability to compromise and agree with one another, by splitting us into tribes
    - this is a problem because it reduces our ability to deal with existential threats, like climate change, which require a level of global consensus and compromise
- caring about, and reminding ourselves of the larger frame consequences is just the start of our journey of ethical strategy
- harms
  - the decay of truth
  - the destabilization of our democracy
  - the capture of our privacy and attention
  - the inequality between the rich and the poor

## Analytics and Strategy are not Enough

"a moral revolution has to rival the technological revolution" - Obama

- analytics and strategy are incredibly powerful
  - they can reveal immense opportunities - but without ethics, also reveal incredible threats
- analytics and strategy have consequences at the scale of the globe and humanity now
  - and as such, I believe we need global scale ethics
  - that helps inform laws with consequences, to help us manage the threats we've opened up
- humanity has made ethical progress over the centuries
  - however there is much work to go yet though - the circle can always be drawn wider

## What Can We Do

What can we do to pursue responsible strategy?

## Start Close In

"Start with your own question, give up on other people's questions...take a small step you can call your own." - David

Whyte

- I think the first step is to look inwards - find what you care about
  - this can come from many places, but a common one is to find it from your own experience of suffering
    - we can find the motivation in compassion for that suffering
    - this is where meaning and purpose is formed, your north star
- this caring can fuel
  - a conviction that better is possible
  - courage to question
    - yourself critically
    - your identity, your tribe, and to find your own unique voice, not just another's voice
- look for areas where you are convinced that better is possible
  - perseverance; optimism; original approaches

## Look Outwards

- in strategic and ethical thinking, you need to question
  - both broadly, and at larger frames
- ask where do you draw your line of caring?
  - what do you consider an externality, and what are the consequences of that?
- we need to look at the interactions with systems we are embedded in
  - what are the political and social implications of your products, industries?
- we especially need discuss with others, especially with those outside your bubble, about the impact of our strategies
  - staying in small family and corporate bubbles limits our responsibilities
  - so strive to broadly learn and socialize your ideas, test them, revise them, teach them

## Accept Responsibility

- If ethical strategy is an aim, then I think we need to accept, encourage, and engage in responsibility to one another.
- Collectively acting is always more powerful than individual action
  - especially so for systemic change
  - we can't tackle climate change alone as one person or nation
- Responsible strategy requires social and political solutions, not just technical solutions
  - civic and political engagement is key for driving change for the better
    - we need to debate the right public policy, and the right incentives
    - I think we need to let our voice be politically heard about consequences for unethical behavior
  - an important capacity here is the ability to communicate and reach across the political spectrum
    - and encourage public discourse especially with those outside our tribes
  - at the end of the day we belong to humanity and life, not just left / right!
- I think we need to engage in, and seek stories of co-responsibility and the common good
  - stories that attempt to core moral questions like:
    - How can we develop new ways of thinking about our economy and its relationship to human systems and planetary health?
    - What should we do about rising inequality?
    - How do we value work? What makes for the dignity of work?
    - What do we owe one another as citizens?
    - How can we rebuild trust in government?

## Summary - What Can We Do

## START CLOSE IN

*Authenticity  
Caring and Compassion  
Critical Questioning*

## WHAT CAN WE DO

## QUESTION BROADLY

*Investigate larger frames  
Question authority and power  
Open eyes to consequences*

## ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

*Engage in collective action  
Civic / political engagement  
Advocate for consequences of unethical acts  
Seek stories of co-responsibility / common good*

- Start Close In
  - authenticity
  - caring and compassion
  - critical questioning
- Question Broadly
  - investigate larger frames
  - question authority and power
  - open eyes to consequences
- Accept Responsibility
  - engage in collective action
  - civic / political engagement
  - advocate for consequences of unethical acts
  - seek stories of co-responsibility / the common good

### Moral Courage

"We make our world significant by the courage of our questions, and the depth of our answers." - Carl Sagan

- it's a process of looking in; looking out; and then engaging responsibly as you are able
  - even though I'm able to talk this stuff, I find all this personally quite difficult and overwhelming at times to even think about, let alone act
- something i've taken away from exploring all this, is that it *is possible* to develop responsible strategy
- and it is encouraging that there are other people on this frontier to help.
- and it all starts with courageous questions of ourselves and our systems
- to build a more ethical world, we have to encourage more people to try, think, act
- and do the HARD WORK work of ethics
- for the common good, for the environments we live in, and for future generations.

### Resources and References

- Special thanks reference
  - Low, K. (2016). The Human Venture Institute mapbook (16th edition). Action Studies Institute.



- Resources

- Podcast

- Your Undivided Attention - Center for Humane Technology Podcast
    - <https://www.humanetech.com/podcast>

- Recent Books

- Winners Take All - Anand Ghiridaradhas

- Systematic inequality

- The Tyranny of Merit - Michael Sandel

- The myth of meritocracy

- The Precipice - Toby Ord

- Existential risk

- Drawdown Project

- <https://drawdown.org/solutions/table-of-solutions>

contact / presentation / ethics resources: [www.nickkal.com/ethics](http://www.nickkal.com/ethics)

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