PUBLIC INTEREST TECHNOLOGY

Privacy and policy: a new school of thought

This transcript is from a video featuring Danny Weitzner, founding director of the MIT Internet Policy Research Initiative. It's part of the *Public Interest Technology* series, celebrating Ford-supported visionaries working at the intersection of art, design, and technology to help shape a future that serves justice and the public interest.

Transcript begins.

Danny Weitzner: When I think of privacy, what I care about the most is really the question of chilling effect. And the challenge policy makers have now, and also people who design these new systems and platforms, is to understand when those platforms are behaving in ways that encourage social interaction and when they're behaving in ways that discourage people from interacting politically, artistically, economically, that chills social interaction.

> [Danny Weitzner, Online Privacy Expert, White House Deputy CTO for Internet Policy, 2011-2012, and Founder of the Center for Democracy and Technology. A white man wearing a gray suit and multicolored bowtie.]

My name is Danny Weitzner. I run the new MIT Internet Policy Research Initiative. We're really in an era where the question of privacy is just fundamental. For four years now, MIT and Georgetown Law School have taught together a course on privacy, technology, and legislation. We bring together about 12 computer science students and 12 law students every year, and we present them with privacy technology challenges. That is, we say, "Look, there's smart city technology developing now, which is going to keep track of where people are driving, the license plates of their cars, where they park, whether they pass a mosque or a church or a synagogue every day and get out on the way to work. What should be the privacy rules associated with that new set of smart city technologies?"

If you're a lawyer, you might say, "OK, what laws apply?" And the answer would be, "Well, probably not many." And then you get a little stuck, because you're not quite sure what to do. If you're a more technology-oriented person, a computer scientist, you look and say, "Wow, we can do all these cool things with all that data. We can learn all kinds of things about people. What can we do with that data? Well, we're not really sure because we don't really know what the rules are or what the rules should be." We bring together these two worlds and try to figure out a solution. So, our challenge to groups of students that we get together every year is to understand the technology context really deeply so that we understand what the privacy risks are, what the privacy opportunities might be, what kinds of privacy protections could we possibly build into technology—to then actually develop a legislative proposal that could be brought to either state legislators or members of Congress.

[Photo of David Vladeck, a white man with gray hair, wearing a gray suit and striped purple tie, standing at a podium. His credentials appear: online privacy expert; Professor, Georgetown University Law Center; Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection at the FTC, 2009-2012.]

When David Vladeck and I started this course, we thought we were teaching about privacy, technology, and law. What we've learned is that we're teaching students an even more essential skill: how to be a public interest technologist—someone who can think deeply about the public policy questions that are raised by technology. What we know is that there is enormous demand for students who have training on both sides of this divide. We know that governments need students like this. We know that regulatory agencies, civil society organizations, and companies need students like this. All of us together as a society really have to be directly engaged in these public interest technology questions to make sure that we're making the most of these new tools that we have in a way that really supports human values.

[This is tech at work for the public! Hashtag Public Interest Tech. Ford Foundation dot org forward slash tech. Ford Foundation logo: a globe made up of a series of small, varied circles.]

And if you like this video about public interest technology, watch the video about Joy and her incredible work on facial recognition and you'll really understand the impact of this kind of training.

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