

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/what-is-responsible-innovation-entire-talk>

Jon Zieger is a co-founder and the executive director of Responsible Innovation Labs, a nonprofit working to create tools and standards to help innovative companies scale responsibly. He was previously the general counsel of Stripe, where he built and oversaw the company's legal, compliance, public policy, and corporate security functions and helped Stripe scale from a small startup to one of the largest fintech companies in the world. In this conversation with Stanford professor Riitta Katila, Zieger explains why Responsible Innovation Labs is developing frameworks for responsible technology innovation and explores what a principled 21st century technology ecosystem might look like.



Transcript

(electronic music) Woman Who you are defines how you build.. 00:00:08,370 - Welcome everyone to the second 00:00:11,580 of the three special live ETL episodes STVP is presenting this summer, before we kick off the fall quarter in late September.. I'm Ritta Katila, professor in Stanford's Management Science and Engineering Department and Research Director of STVP.. Today, I'm excited to be hosting a conversation with John Zieger.. John is a co-founder and the executive director of a nonprofit called Responsible Innovation Labs.. We are doing much research and teaching on responsible innovation at Stanford, and when I heard that John is heading Responsible Innovation Labs, I thought "We need to find out more." So what Responsible Innovation Labs does, they are working to create tools and ethics based frameworks to help technology-based startups scale in responsible ways.. Before Responsible Innovation Labs, John was the general counsel of Stripe, where he built and oversaw the company's legal public policy and corporate security functions and helped Stripe scale from a very small startup to one of the largest FinTech companies in the world.. Before Stripe, John spent almost a decade at Microsoft, where he oversaw the legal functions for Microsoft Search, advertising and other online properties.. Welcome, John to ETL.. How's your day so far? - It's good, Ritta..

Thanks so much.. 00:01:38,537 It's really good to be here with you.. - Thanks for joining us.. 00:01:42,260 So, first off, since Responsible Innovation Labs is such a new organization, we wanted to ask you to spend just a few minutes talking about how the organization got started and the problem that your nonprofit is trying to solve.. So floor is yours for a few minutes, John.. - Super.. So thanks for that.. 00:02:07,850 And, again, thanks for having me here to talk about it and you're right.. It is a little hard to find information.. I'm going to share a quick deck, which will just kind of touch on....

Let's see.. So Responsible Innovation Labs.. Let me start with, Ritta, as you say, a little bit of the origin story here, and I won't kind of go through all of the numbers and details on the slide, but maybe start with a little bit of the story or some context.. So when I left Stripe in the beginning of 2020, I started a period after taking a little bit of time off, started a series of discussions with former colleagues, friends, people that I had known and worked with in the industry around a kind of shared thesis that a number of us were kind of coming to.. And it sort of goes like this.. On the one hand, I think I and my kind of collaborators in these discussions were all people who had benefited enormously from the technology industry.. And we're really believers in the power of ambitious technology companies to change the world for the good.. We think that the biggest problems that society faces, whether that is climate change or the availability of high quality education or healthcare, or you name the issue, innovation and the kind of innovation driven by ambitious technology companies will be essential to getting good outcomes for society.. It's not the only thing, but it's a critical part of that.. And so in that sense, we're great believers in the technology industry..

It is indeed shaping the world that we live in.. By the same token, I think we all looked at where we were at the beginning of 2020, and certainly I think not much has changed for the better, and the trend of a technology industry that kind of, you know, moved fast and broke things as you know, to kind of paraphrase, was really quite troubling, right? It turns out we moved very fast and we broke some things that are very hard to fix.. And when you take those two things, the power of innovation and the risks attendant to that innovation and the unintended consequences produced by that, it really creates a situation that calls out for us as an industry, I think, to think very hard about, right? And so that's sort of what motivated, you know, in the first instance, the kind of motivating spirit behind us.. A believer that we need more innovation, we need more good innovation.. We need fewer unintended consequences of that innovation.. And whether you think about technology from

the perspective of economic growth, where it is the principal driver of growth in the economy, both in the US and in many other places around the world, or whether you think about it as this force shaping our lives, right? How we interact with others, the kinds of work that we do or don't do, and so on and so forth, right? It is essential that we get it right in really fundamental ways.. And so for us, you know, we'll talk more about this in the context of the discussion, but, you know, there's a way in which you can think about these problems in a very sort of economic or almost technocratic way, right? It's about kind of getting a growth, right? It's about, you know, preserving sort of shareholder values.. There's a lot of ways that, that we get very, kind of, there's a sort of bloodlessness in some ways about the way that we sometimes talk about this.. But I think the thing that I kind of want to communicate, and that motivates us is there's a real kind of moral force to this work, right? There is a sense that like who we are as a society and what our world will look like over time is going to be driven by this kind of work, right? Getting technology that is responsible, innovation that is in the interests of society.. And so that's kind of where we're coming from in this..

So that sort of led us to, okay, well, what's a high- great, fine, you know, we sort of share that point of view, but then what's a high leverage way to drive the kind of impact, to sort of bend the curve toward innovation that is more responsible over time? And our thesis kind of going in was, "Okay, well, early stage technology companies are sort of where it's at," right? It's if we can get to early stage companies and kind of help them in a variety of ways, and we'll talk about some of the ways that we might do that, that we would get better outcomes over time.. And that proved to be true, but also challenging.. And we'll talk about some of those challenges as we kind of get in to this.. Without going into tremendous detail, I think one of the things that became apparent to us was there are already forces pushing technology companies to be somewhat responsible, or at least let's say to appear somewhat responsible, because there is sometimes both are true, or one or the other is true.. These are some of them, I won't kind of go through all.. There's employee pressure, which is probably for many, you know, west coast US-based technology companies is maybe the most salient, right? There's a lot of employee activism and pressure, but there are others.. You know, people are familiar with the ESG movement, and impact investing.. That's an increasingly important part of pushing, not just technology companies, but really all corporate actors toward a more, certainly in the public markets, toward a more responsible path.. But I think for all of these sources of pressure, because they're very ill suited to technology companies, they have not generally contemplated the issues associated with innovation driven businesses and particularly for private technology companies, because there is so little transparency, these sources of pressure don't ladder up to really sustained change and improvement over time.. They tend to be one-off interactions between, whether it's the investor or the employee group, that sort of melt away and don't really amount to a time..

And so our view was, given that there is that set diffuse pressures, there's an opportunity to really drive toward more, you know, those things pulling in the same direction.. Sort of harness that diffuse energy and get it pulling in the same direction.. And, you know, as you said, when you were introducing, Ritta, the first thing there, and the core of what we're focused on is actionable tools, information and frameworks that are operator oriented, that really distill the very best of what is happening in the industry, but take in voices from the right kind of stakeholders outside of industry, people who are knowledgeable about these domains and begin to create things that companies can implement that help them be both more responsible and in many cases, more efficient and more focused.. So that's sort of our thing.. One, eventually we hope to turn those into real standards and to get those standards implemented as part of the investment process for venture capital firms and other investors, and the acquisition process for acquirers.. And through that to create transparency that can drive a path for kind of continuous improvement in standards.. So we broadly talk about four pillars of responsibility.. I think this is one cut on a lot of different ways that you could talk or think about this.. I won't go through all of the text here, just to say, you know, one is this sort of bucket of privacy, safety and security.. It's really this idea of respecting user autonomy and building companies that think about the user as an autonomous actor..

Whose data, person and decisions have kind of independent value and dignity and building kind of governance and systems that are reflective of that.. Right, so that's kind of one.. The second is this idea of openness and diversity.. And as we've gone through our discussions, I think one of the things that's become clear is this is in many ways the foundational thing.. And we'll probably talk more about it in the course of the conversation, but who is at the table? Who gets to make decisions, you know, at every level of an organization about what matters, what problems have significance, what don't? All of that is essential, not just to building a diverse organization, but to building an organization that thinks about the interests of society writ large.. And so that's an important topic in building an open and diverse company.. And then economic opportunity inclusion is, in many ways, it's sort of the other side of the same coin.. And it's really about the question of, as we innovate, as we build technology products, the impacts of those.. Who is disrupted and who is not? Whose jobs are lost, you know, and whose are gained? What problems we choose to solve.. All of that is really in this bucket of economic opportunity and inclusion..

How do we build an industry that pulls people up and along, rather than one that leaves them behind and pulls all the chips over to one side of the table? And the last is that, you know, it's straightforward.. It's environment and sustainability.. The biggest crisis, I think facing humanity at the moment, in many ways, remains global climate change.. And it's one that the technology industry has a unique opportunity to contribute to solutions to, and potentially also to furthering.. So those are for us, kind of the four pillars that we're quite focused on.. Our process here, and I'll sort of wrap up with this, we very much believe that it's not for us to come down from the mountain with the tablets and say, "This is what good looks like," right? "This is what responsible is.. We're smart folks, trust us." We believe that it has to be grounded in practice.. It has to be grounded in what people are really doing, but really finding the very best.. One of the things that always impressed me about Patrick Collison as a founder, when I was at Stripe for many years, was when we would have hard problems, whether those

were business challenges, or you know, sort of some of the issues we're talking about or others, one of the things he would do is go and have discussions with the very best people he could find in the world.. And they might be people that we, they might be other founders, they might be authors, they might be academics, they might be, you know, government leaders, and sort of distill that, kind of marinade in all of that wisdom, distill it down and then say, "Okay, I think this is what we should do from that," right? "I think this is reflective of the very best I can come up with, plus how we think about it and then let's do that." We're trying to, in some sense, recreate that process..

The first product that we're focused on is what we call platform governance.. And we'll maybe explain a little bit more in the conversation as to why we ended up landing on that product.. But it's really the set of questions around, under what circumstances can users use a product? When do you prevent them from using it? How do you govern that set of interactions? And that obviously became enormously salient on January 6th.. It has been for certain kinds of companies for a very long time.. Our process has been gathering facts from people, having interviews with founders.. This 100 number is more broadly, it's not only on platform governance.. That's a broad set of conversations we've had with founders on a lot of topics.. Interviewing thought leaders and kind of doing literature reviews and kind of trying to distill all of that down to the core of a framework that we can build and use that it is a useful tool for companies that we can then pilot and gain feedback from companies on.. So that's sort of it.. This is sort of the team right now..

We are growing.. We also have a great big intern class this summer, which is awesome.. So if any of you or your students or academics, if you have folks that are interested in internships on these topics, we will continue to do that.. So that's also an opportunity that I thought I'd socialize.. - That's very exciting and a very big project.. 00:15:32,670 So to get us started, talk a little bit about why responsible innovations.... So kind of why you joined this effort yourself? Maybe there was something in your personal, professional experience, you mentioned the Stripe founder, inspirations or something else that motivated you to focus on these very big and important issues.. - Yeah, no, it's a good question, Ritta.. 00:15:57,550 So, I think a few things.. A lot of these issues, whether it's privacy issues, DNI sets of issues, platform governance issues were ones that I had spent a lot of time on in my career, both at Microsoft and at Stripe..

And so for that reason, they were, you know, I think for all of them, there's a set of, a way in which they were kind of the burr in the saddle, like, you know, you kind of, you know, you just need to keep working it, it's just not quite there yet.. So there's certainly some aspects of these feeling like unsolved problems that I had an interest in seeing more work done and participating more in the work.. You're right though, that the Stripe experience was super informative for me, in the sense that, you know, I'll kind of give this anecdote.. One of the things I always loved about working at Stripe, and I think one of the things that has set it apart and it's reflective of both its scale and sort of significance as a company, and, you know, in some ways, its kind of value in the maturity, that's sort of reflective of that, has been the founders, you know, John and Patrick are really extraordinary founders in a lot of ways, but one of the ways is this sense that they were building from day one, a long-term sustainable business, right? This was not a business we were trying to just grow, right? It was a business that we expected to be working on and certainly they expected to be working on for decades.. And that kind of longterm and sustainable mindset really informed everything we did.. And one example of that, that I, you know, I was sort of responsible for driving was on the regulatory side, right? Stripe is in a heavily regulated business.. It moves massive amounts of other people's money around the world, you know, more or less the most heavily regulated business category that we have.. And even before we were regulated, very early in the life of that business, one of the things that I did, we were a two year old company in the United States, which was our principle market at the time.. We, you know, knew we would eventually need a certain kind of license, what's called the money transmission license.. And so we went to regulators, we actually, they have a conference, the Money Transmission Regulators Association, they have a conference every year, and we went to their conference and we booked a little hospitality suite, and we said, "We're from this little company Stripe," we invited them all to come in little bogs..

"We're from this company, and here's what we do.. Here's how we do it.. Here's who we are.. And as we grow, you may hear more about us, you know, here's how to get in touch with us," right? And that sense of engagement with, and respect for regulators and their role, which, you know, you'll remember sort of, this is back in 2014 when the, you know, the biggest show in town was Uber, which was a very different view of regulators, right? It was sort of move fast, establish presence on the ground, and they're different businesses, so I don't wanna overdraw the parallels, but I think that kind of engaged and sustainable and long-term model was one that we saw work well from a business perspective, but also, I think just fundamentally worked better from a kind of societal perspective.. We were able to do things that were reflective of the intention of regulators in ways that it would have been very hard if we had sort of, you know, kind of hid and made them kind of run to catch up to us.. So that's sort of one example.. I'll give you one more in a little bit of a different vein and then you can move on to your next, if you have others, but.... You know, when I was still at Microsoft, well, actually, before I get into it, I'll preface and say, I think there's a way in which incentives and the creation of incentives, you know, sort of takes on this momentum, right? Early in the life of a company, there's a lot of fluidity.. You can change, you know, what are the principle business drivers, et cetera.. But those ossify over time, you begin to build businesses around them, you make certain representations to your investors, whether that's in the private or public markets..

And so those incentives begin to drive the, you know, there's a period in which you're driving the incentives and then there's a time in which they drive you, right? One of the things that I have often thought is that there were ways in which the companies that are very responsible for our present information ecosystem could have changed the outcome, right? There

was a time very early in the life, and I'll use Facebook, but it's certainly not the only example, when that company could have chosen not to kind of plant its flag on the engagement-driven, social graph, engagement-driven business model, and done something else.. And an example I'll give you here is that I was at a conference that the AP hosted, The Associated Press hosted in 2008, or maybe it was early 2009.. And it was around the question of algorithmic news.. And, actually, the AP's focus, of folks who were, sort of, you know, in the industry or thinking about it back then would remember that it was Google News that was the big issue.. They were really focused on Google News.. And one of the issues that was coming up at this conference was sort of what's the future of news and sort of these algorithmically generated, you know, news sites? But one of the issues that was coming up from academics in particular, was filter bubbles.. And the ways in which filter bubbles would create, you know, this sort of cabining off of people into distinct information spheres.. And it was talked about from people from Google and Facebook and others, and the thinking at the time was, "Well, maybe it's an issue, but people don't get most of their news from the internet.. And they get it from other places, they get it from the newspaper and they get it from TV or other places.. And so it's really not a thing to worry about." And I've often thought, you know, back to your question of why I'm doing this and why focus on this particular effort? I have often thought that there was a time, that was a moment in which somebody could have stood up and said, "Yeah, we're aware that there's a possible downside here..

There's an externality that is real, it's serious, people are thinking about.. We don't agree.. We maybe don't agree that it's going to be that big of a problem, but let's do what we in Silicon Valley and the tech industry do really well, let's put a metric on it.. Let's measure it.. Let's watch for it.. And let's manage it," right? and then you, in my, you know, my counterfactual, that may or may not, you know, we'll never know.. Maybe you end up in a world where the current fracturing of the information space would have been, if not avoided, at least much more aggressively managed much earlier, I think, to the manifest benefit of the world.. So anyway, those are some reasons, and there's sort of lots of them, but those are a couple of thoughts on that.. - Great.. That's great..

00:23:40,440 I want to come back to the news and platforms and regulation a little bit later, but if I may, can I step back a little bit and let's talk about Responsible Innovation Labs and how you build a nonprofit like that.. So we have Steve Blank talking about customer discovery process, and I was wondering how you validate a need for this type of an organization.. And you mentioned a few interviews you did, or many interviews in fact.. Talk more about the process of building a nonprofit like that.. How long does it take? You know, what kinds of stakeholders do you involve, et cetera? - Yeah, it's an interesting question.. 00:24:24,250 And for me very much, you know, it's my first time building a nonprofit.. So I'm guessing there are probably other folks on this call who have lots of great experience that I could learn from, but I'll tell you a little bit about what our journey has been.. You know, so one of our key partners on this, you may have seen his picture on the slides is Hemant Tenaja, who's the managing director of General Catalyst, which have been very helpful.. They've been a great partner of ours, because I think the partners there really care about this, it's a big part of how they are working to build that firm and, you know, even their investment thesis.. But one of the benefits of that, of having them as a partner is they've been great at putting us in touch with their portfolio companies and, you know, so some of this, I think if you were just starting from, you know, ground zero and kind of knocking on people's doors or sending cold emails, that would have been a little tougher..

Because we had that connection, you know, we've been able to spend a lot of time with founders at a really high quality, you know, portfolio companies at one of the highest quality VC firms, you know, around.. That's been great for us, because it's given us a lot of access.. And so what we've done is sit down with people, explain a little bit of our thesis, ask them questions around what matters to them, how they make, what are the issues that they're facing around.... And it tends to be a little loose and be a little bit guided discussions in the sense that, you know, there are some companies who are very AI focused, there are some companies that are very healthcare focused and so on.. You do find that there's a set of commonalities across companies.. So diversity is an issue for just about every company and it's often a very top-of-mind issue, but.... So we would have a series of discussions with companies to sort of discover where they had issues, you know, where they saw opportunities for us.. "If we had materials like this, would that be helpful to you?" You know, it was a little bit of that kind of discussion.. And we did a lot of those with founders.. And those were, I think in many ways, the most informative, but with lots of other folks as well..

A lot with investors, we've had some, you know, we can sort of tell you a little bit about some of the various wild hares we chased down.. "What if we did this?" And you know, "What if we did..." We thought, well, for awhile, we could get the LP community, that that would be the way.. You know, we would sort of leverage the LPs to kind of, you know, lever the VCs, and have the VCs force.... That turned out for a variety of reasons not to be super fruitful.. But we had to get to, say more about that if it's an interest.. But so that interview process mostly with founders at the core was the main driver of a lot of what we did.. I think with what we got out of that was a real clear sense that there was a need.. And we've come to talk about it a lot as like a last mile problem, right? There's a way in which, you know, you, others, people who work around this space know that there's a lot of really good thinking that's happening, right? In NGOs, in academia, in various groups within industry.. Not that much is making it to the founders who are the people making the decisions.. There's a lot of dropout there..

And so one of the things that we're, you know, that became really clear to us is there's some stuff that we need to invent, but a lot of this is just like finding the best stuff and getting it to people, right? Getting it to people in a way that they can consume.. So that was kind of an interesting sort of validating thing.. I mean, broadly, that's kind of been our discovery process.. We spend a lot of time talking to other NGOs in the space, other kind of nonprofits working around this.. I think through that became convinced that while there were people working on important contiguous aspects of the problem, there

was really nobody attacking it from this sort of operator oriented, tools, frameworks, you know, kind of practical utility perspective, or at least not in the way we are thinking about it.. And so that also kind of gave us some sense that there's really a thing there.. There's a real space to fill.. - That's great.. 00:28:47,870 And talk a little bit more about why you pivoted from these early, you said earlier you focused on early stage companies, but then later you realized maybe it's these later stage startups that are in most need of your tools and programs.. Talk a little bit about that change and pivot..

- Sure, yeah.. 00:29:09,510 No, it's a good point.. And yeah, so, what we started with was, as you say, it was sort of the sense that, and the thesis being like, "Okay, it's early stage companies," and I do believe, you know, I continue to believe that there is this real way in which the earlier you get to companies, the more impactful you are likely to be able to be.. I think that's broadly true.. The problem that frankly should have, as people who've worked in and around startups for a long time, should have been apparent, but, you know, maybe optimism was better than our kind of knowledge, but was that early stage companies, you know, as many of the folks here will know are in a mode where almost everything is an existential issue, right? Am I going to get customers? Am I going to be able to grow the team? Am I gonna be able to raise capital to do those other things? You know, will I get product-market fit? And so on.. And every one of those is a sort of ticking clock with a kind of immediacy that is salient, right? That wakes the founder up early, you know, very early in the morning, to get out and go do those things.. And so, you know, we had a number of founders express a thought in various ways, but very similar sentiment, which is, "Look, I care a lot about this." You know, one of the things you will often have is founders who are multiple time founders.. They have a little bit of perspective on this.. They care a lot.. They care a lot about it..

They even have a little bit, you know, they're not, you know, the company is.... Their whole reputation is not on this company, but so they really care about it.. But what they will say is some version of, "If it doesn't help me grow faster, if it doesn't help me move more quickly, I don't really have a lot of time for it." Like I'll do a little and like, I'll do the things that are closest.. And so this is one of the reasons why diversity often ends up being the issue that sort of, you know, sort of pops its head up as one that early stage founders will engage on is because it's so salient for them.. And it is kind of critical path for growing the team.. They know if they grow the company too off-kilter and sort of in a non-diverse way that it will hurt them in significant ways, and so they do want to solve that problem.. But for many of the other kinds of problems, whether it's thinking about ethical AI and how they're going to, you know, build systems that protect, you know, their users around that, whether it's privacy or security or sustainability, any of those things.. They're much more abstract and they will get the marginal time that those companies have, or those founders have.. And as you know, for early stage companies it's very often the founder or one of a few co-founders, that are doing this work.. They're hiring, they're raising money, they're selling..

And then the other hat is thinking about how to build an ethical company.. And that will often, you know, without any ill intent get sort of short shrift.. You know, and the reason that matters, and I'll sort of pivot to the larger companies question here, is one of the things that, you know, folks will know if you've thought much about startups.. Certainly it was a, for me, a core learning from Stripe is one of the most valuable things you can have as a startup company of any kind, whether you're a nonprofit or a for-profit is users who will give you feedback, who will use your product and give you feedback on it Right? That's how you iterate quickly.. That's how you improve, and ultimately how you serve a real need for a broad set of customers who find value in what you do.. And so for us, finding a set of users who could be, wouldn't just care in an abstract way, but actually had the time and resources to be able to engage with us was essential.. And what we found is that somewhat later stage companies, anywhere from, let's say two to three years, pre-IPO through early stage public companies, were often a better partner for us for a couple of reasons.. They cleared a lot of those existential hurdles, right? Almost by definition.. If you're starting to think about path to liquidity, it's likely because you've cleared the product-market fit.. You've got, you know, sort of the momentum of the company doesn't just depend on the founders..

And so you have a little bit of space to think about things that feel less, totally critical path, one.. Two, you probably have, along with that, people who are responsible for those functions.. You have a head of people, you have a general counsel, you have, you know, other C-suite folks who have as a part of their mandate, thinking about aspects of this.. And so you start to have a partner that you're able to kind of work with there.. And sometimes people who are even more specialized on aspects of this, like diversity and Chief Diversity Officer.. So, for us, that's great, because those people can really be engaged counterparts.. They bring some amount of subject matter knowledge and it can be a very kind of high bandwidth, you know, engagement.. And the last is that they often, you know, because of trends in the public markets and the expectations of investors and other things, those companies that are looking to the public markets and beyond, kind of need to have an answer on many of these things.. Not all of them and not to the same degree on all of them, but they're going to have something they need to say to people about later, right? "What do we do about diversity?" "Well, we need to have some story.. I don't know what it's gonna be, but we're gonna need to have a....

We will not simply be well to just kind of, you know, hide behind the shutter shield.. We're going to have to talk to people about these things." And so that combination of, you know, space, people and a kind of internally driven motivation, "This is a thing we know we need to do," make them very good customers for us.. Our hope remains that we can use those folks as our kind of, you know, kind of inner ring to help us build these products, but be able to kind of move the frameworks and tools, sort of slide them down and ultimately, potentially even slide them up a little bit as kind of, in some ways all companies become kind of innovation companies and aspects of this will apply to the largest company.. But for now, that's where we're sort of starting and then hoping to kind of move around from there.. - Great.. 00:35:44,650 So I want to shift gears a little bit and ask about your initial focus on platform governance.. I was curious why you thought that platform governance is the right

place to start? And I guess what is platform governance and why should we be worried about it? - Yeah, I mean, it's a good question.. 00:36:05,780 And I think it's, you know, sort of maybe reflective of the prior answer at least in the first instance, in the sense that it's kind of opportunistic, right? This for us was a place where we had a set of motivated users, who really understood that they need help.. And you know, I'll say as someone who has been responsible for.... Well, actually I'll answer your direct question, which is what is platform governance, or at least how do we conceive of platform governance? I think platform governance is the set of decisions one makes around who can use a platform under what circumstances? When will they be deprived with the ability to use it, under what, you know, with what sort of process will they be deprived of the ability to use it? And so on, right? You can certainly cast it more broadly..

I think there are broader aspects of it.. There's, you know, questions that touch on privacy and data usage and other things.. But the core of it for us has been this closer to what you might call ethical use or acceptable use, right? It's really this question of who can use a platform and under what circumstances? And that came to, you know, that's been an issue obviously for a long time for the information platforms, for the social media companies.. But, you know, particularly over the last few years, and especially after the January 6th capital, call it an insurrection, I don't know what we're calling it these days.. But anyway, capital thing that happened is a bunch of companies that were well outside of the narrative on that question found themselves right in the middle of it, right? And so you have Amazon Web Service, you know, as low level of an infrastructure provider as you are going to have, right? All the way, pretty much to the bare metal of the internet, except for, you know, the telecodes, right? Who have a different kind of statutory framework that applies to them.. You know, making decision to off-board another platform, right? Parler, and a set of other users as well, and effectively kick them off of the internet, right? Obviously you have Twitter deciding independently that the President of the United States can no longer speak on its platform, and so on.. And without making any judgements about whether any of those decisions were the right decisions or wrong decisions, what happened was a bunch of companies realized they had really, they had sort of acceptable use or similar kinds of policies, which often amounted to a sentence or two in the terms of service.. But those were effectively, you know, what we lawyers would call holding statements, right? They were not often, they're not very well thought out.. They were "We will get back to this at some point in the future," right? And what has happened after January is I think a wide swath of companies have realized we really need to think much harder about this and build policies, frameworks, and internal processes that are much better calibrated to deal with this set of issues.. And so that's kind of why, and we had a number of those folks reach out to us, partly because this is an area that I had spent a lot of time on in my career, and one where I talked to a lot of my general counsel colleagues about, when they understood kind of the mission that we were embarked on, you know, the discussion was, "Well, hey, this would be a great place, if you could help us, this would be a great place to do it." And so that's sort of, so that's why I say it's a little opportunistic..

I think if we had, in November of last year it was not the area where we were going to start.. There were some other areas, but this one kind of rose to the fore.. - And very topical.. 00:40:05,210 So as I think about this, how do you think about, and how does Responsible Innovation Labs think about regulation in this context? So the two options we could go with sort of government regulation, or we could go with self-regulation by the companies themselves to try to tackle, you know, platform governance issues, power of digital platforms, all of these public concerns about platforms.. What's your take on this? - I mean, my take, 00:40:43,960 and, you know, mostly this is you're getting me, John Zieger, as opposed to reflective of any particular, of our users or anyone else, but I'll kind of give you the sense, both some of the senses that I've gotten from talking to others and my view on it.. Look, I think most companies would be very happy to have regulation in this space.. It's not true to every company, but I think most companies would be very happy to see clear and fairly prescriptive regulation that makes their judgment burden lighter.. Because one of the things, you know, the problems that we find right now, is that the amount of judgment that is applied to these problems and the kind of unbounded state of the problem space, right, means that they're very risky.. They have a lot of brand risk.. They have a lot of employee risk..

They have a lot of risk for companies in all dimensions, right? You know, you look at any of the ones that have been very public, there's really, it's a complete no-win situation, right? It's lots of risks in both directions.. You're balanced on a knife edge, trying to make decisions in a principled way, you know, sort of dragons on all sides.. And, you know, the lack of constraint both enhances that risk, results in a great deal of inefficiency.. So a lot of internal churn on these things.. And then maybe worst of all, because it undermines confidence in the companies and creates a kind of cynicism from other actors is a sort of flip-flopping, where you can go from a decision that is sort of this on, you know, today, and then that tomorrow and very little change in the facts.. And you're sort of wondering, well, what.... And so, you know, I think if companies could get regulation that was very clear and prescriptive and alleviated a lot of that judgment, I think they would take it.. Many of them would take it, not all.. I don't wanna, you know, paint with too broad of a brush, but many of the companies who don't view information services in particular as core to their mission would absolutely just take it.. The problem, you know, depending on your perspective, the problem is it's very unlikely that that's going to happen, right? What we're going to get, if we get regulation is going to be some sort of broad, you know, requirement to do some kind of diligence that will create additional legal risk and liability, but is very unlikely to alleviate the kind of judgment burden and the inefficiency burden..

And so for those reasons, I think the core of this is going to have to come from industry.. And there's a role for regulation.. I think there will be, I think over time, there will be some amount of regulation, but I don't think that regulation is going to solve the problem that is most acute for these companies.. - Excellent.. 00:43:31,590 We have only a few minutes left, so I want to move us to the last segment, which is sort of forward looking, thinking about what success might look like.. You started the new organization.. This is the first year.. So if we sort of step back and think about ethically healthy, 21st century

technology ecosystem, what's your vision? What would success look like there? - Yeah, Ritta, it's a couple of things.. 00:44:05,280 So one, I guess I'll just say generally, I think one of the important things to kind of think through here is that, you know, in many ways I'd say an ethically healthy technology ecosystem looks like an ethically healthy society, right? It looks like the innovation ecosystem addressing the biggest problems that society has and being really thoughtful about not exacerbating the ones that it has helped to drive, like income inequality and these kinds of things.. But with that as kind of a maybe too broad brush statement, I think for us, you know, we will, you know, sort of evaluate ourselves based on the number of companies that are using our framework to make decisions..

We wanna see a lot of companies using our frameworks.. And I mean, we're not proprietary about them, if there are other great frameworks that's great too, but we think our frameworks will ultimately be good and useful and reflective of a high standard of behavior.. And so that's one.. We wanna see a lot of companies using them.. Two, and maybe more importantly, we wanna see capital allocators, venture capital firms, private equity, others, using our standards as criteria for investment.. We think that at the end of the day, the gasoline in the engine of America's innovation economy, the world's innovation economy to a substantial degree is venture capital.. And so if we can get those firms to be thoughtful about, as they are in many cases already, right? They're very thoughtful about the, you know, they have visions about what the technology state of the world, you know, whether it's investment in alternative energies or AI or other things, they have a view about what the technology state of the world they want to see, you know, come into existence is gonna be.. We need them to also have a view about what the responsibility state of the world is gonna be, and to use that as a gate for their investment decisions.. I think those are probably the things that are most important to us.. There are probably others as well, but that's how we'll evaluate our success..

- I wanna end with two audience questions.. 00:46:08,920 The first one is we have a lot of students, educators in the audience.. What can students specifically do as they are becoming tomorrow's innovators? - Look, I think there's a couple of things 00:46:22,197 that are important here.. One is students will be, you know, the kinds of students that are involved in a program like yours, many of the other folks who are attending this, are going to be some of the most sought after people by these technology companies, right? And they're gonna have a seat at the table as they go into industry that will be influential.. And I do think there's a way in which we collectively need to.... It's sort of a responsibility of all of us in the technology ecosystem to normalize asking questions about the ethics and responsibility of what it is we do.. You know, that's not gonna be the same for everybody at every level, but I do think there's a way in which it's critical that we kind of normalize those questions, right? That we are not merely kind of the platonic rational economic actor, like we're actors in society.. And so that's kind of the thing I would say is sort of first and foremost.. I think both for students and for researchers, students who re their education career, researchers who are doing this over the longer term, there remain, I think a whole enormous set of questions that are unanswered around the intersection between practice and outcomes.. So I'll give you an example that we've been thinking a bunch about in the context of diversity..

I think that performance evaluation systems, right? Which are enormous, are the driver of how income and wealth to a substantial degree are allocated at technology companies, very, very important, are a driver of how people progress in those companies, who has power in those companies, are I think an area that has been a kind of comparative backwater and where there is enormous opportunity.. When we talk about diversity and inclusion, we seldom, in my experience, talk really hard about those systems, right? I think there's a ton of opportunity to really figure out what works, what makes people feel valued, included.. How do we eliminate bias in those things? There's a lot of superficial stuff.. There's very little that I think is very real.. And there's very little that's measuring the outcomes.. So it's an example, I think an important one, but it's one of many where think there's a ton of opportunity to research how practice and outcomes relate to one another on these responsibility issues.. (electronic music)..