

Moral dilemmas and design methodologies

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What society experiences today as morally-questionable design, from pink dolls for girls and blue trucks for boys, to accessibility challenges in public buildings, is the aftermath of an under-developed foundation for moral engagement in design methodologies. Although designing is an inherently moral activity, little has been done to support handling moral dilemmas encountered in design processes. What are the defining elements of a design methodology that renders moral dilemmas visible, and with that, moral engagement with ethical issues possible, desirable and manageable?

The aim of this paper is to set the stage for a methodological framework on moral engagement that exposes and utilises moral dilemmas that arise in design processes. For this, we compare three value-based and conflict-inspired design methods, namely Value Sensitive Design (inspired by value tensions), Vision in Product Design (inspired by conflicts among context factors), and Dilemma-Driven Design (inspired by intra-personal concern conflicts). We draw from existing case studies which implemented each method to demonstrate our findings. Finally, we outline the main opportunities and challenges in designing with value conflicts. This paper will reveal how value-based design methods can contribute to the discussion on the notion of moral responsibility in design.

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