

Blog 6: Age of Intelligence: A megagame about AI and ethics

Imagine thirty people in a room, each representing powerful nations and tech companies, negotiating the future of artificial intelligence while racing against time, limited resources, and ethical dilemmas. This is "Age of Intelligence," our megagame that transforms complex real-world challenges into an intense, immersive learning experience.

On December 3rd, 2024, we hosted a full, three-hour version of our megagame with thirty participants drawn from our student body, faculty, and staff. Players were divided into five teams representing major global powers and tech giants. Adding intrigue to the mix were two wild card roles: a persistent environmental activist pressing for sustainable AI development, and an investigative journalist ready to expose questionable dealings.

Figure 1 Action
Photo: Daan van Smaalen

Inside the Game: How It Worked

Teams started with different resource levels reflecting real-world disparities: advanced economies commanded larger AI research budgets and talent pools, while emerging nations balanced development goals with limited means. All teams had to carry out careful negotiations to balance profit, public perception, and impact.

The gameplay unfolded across nine rounds, with Game Master Karel Millenaar orchestrating world events that kept players on their toes. In one memorable scenario, a sophisticated cyberattack grounded all global air traffic, forcing teams to adapt their strategies when they couldn't physically move their representatives around the room.

Figure 2 Game master
Photo: Daan van Smaalen

Other scenarios tested players' ethical frameworks: Would a nation share its advanced AI safety protocols with competitors to prevent a potential catastrophe? Should companies prioritize profit over privacy when developing new AI tools? Teams had to balance their own objectives with the greater good, often discovering that "doing the right thing" came with significant economic or political costs.

These connections to real-world challenges made the game more than just an entertaining afternoon. Players experienced firsthand how competing interests, limited information, and time pressure affect decision-making in the AI sector. As one interviewee suggested, it is easy to let your morals slide when you have material goals you can achieve instead.

Figure 3 Cards
Photo: Daan van Smaalen

Learning Through Chaos: The Player Experience

The word "chaos" came up in player interviews, but not necessarily as a negative. In fact, the complexity and chaos is a unique part of the megagame experience and what we think makes playing the game meaningful. There are so many players, teams, and opposing goals that no one has clear. Players might feel uncomfortable at points, but overcoming this by interacting with various perspectives and issues is rewarding. The role-playing aspect also played a part in helping participants understand opposing viewpoints and getting a handle on the complexity.

Looking Ahead: Next Steps

The next steps for the megagame team are to interview players, analyze the data, and, of course, plan another megagame (reach out if you want to join!). We are looking forward to improving our game and continuing our exploration of megagames as a learning experience. Check back for the next blog post to learn more about key takeaways for participants, how players' understanding of AI ethics changed, and what unexpected insights emerged from the gameplay.