

AAE SPECIAL SEMINAR

Safety, sales, and the 737-MAX

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Biography

Tim O'Brien is an Affiliate Associate Professor at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy & Governance. A tech industry veteran, Tim studies and writes about technology, policy, law, and ethics. While at Microsoft, Tim was involved in ethical AI advocacy and policy work with the company's largest enterprise customers around the world, spanning multiple vertical industries including retail, manufacturing, healthcare, and financial services. He has over 30 years of experience in industry as an engineer, consultant, technology strategist, and policy expert. Tim has a BS in aeronautical & astronautical engineering from Purdue University, an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, and a Master of Jurisprudence degree from the University of Washington School of Law.

Abstract

In October of 2018, a brand new Boeing 737-MAX crashed shortly after takeoff from Jakarta, Indonesia, diving straight into the Java Sea. Questions surfaced immediately about the possible role of a mysterious flight control system unknown to the airline or to aviation regulators. Five months later, as accusations of wrongdoing by the plane's manufacturer created a groundswell of criticism and spawned a congressional investigation, another 737-MAX crash occurred in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under similar circumstances. The story that would unfold in its aftermath has made the tragic saga of the MAX an essential case study in engineering ethics, corporate culture, regulatory capture, dynamics of the commercial aircraft business, and the behavior of ordinary people under extraordinary pressure. This talk will follow the chronology of events that led to these tragedies, and delve into the cascading effects of decisions large & small that set the MAX on the path to disaster.