The 2027 Singularity: An Ethical Reckoning for Project Management

PMI Southwest Ohio and Dayton/Miami Valley Chapter's Summit 2025

Eric Frayer - 11/7/2025

The Project Manager's Unchanging Compass

- **The PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct:**
  The Foundation

- **Four Core Values:**
  - Responsibility
  - Respect
  - Fairness
  - Honesty

Aspirational vs. Mandatory Standards

- **Aspirational Standards:** The conduct we strive for.
  - *Example: "We make decisions...based on the best interests of society, public safety, and the environment."* [5]
- **Mandatory Standards:** The firm requirements we must meet.
  - *Example: "We do not engage in...illegal behavior."* [5]
- **Key Concept:** Aspirational failures create the conditions for mandatory violations. They are the leading indicators on our ethical risk register.

The New Frontier: AI and Project Management

PMI is actively shaping the conversation on AI ethics.[6]

- **Key AI Ethical Considerations:**
  - Fairness & Bias
  - Transparency & Explainability
  - Human Safety & Oversight
  - Privacy & Data Management [8]
- **The PM's Dual Mandate:**
  - **Adopter:** Using AI for project efficiency.
  - **Guardian:** Ensuring the project's AI deliverable is ethical.

The AI-2027 Singularity

An Ethical Reckoning for Project Management

The Project Manager's Ethical Compass

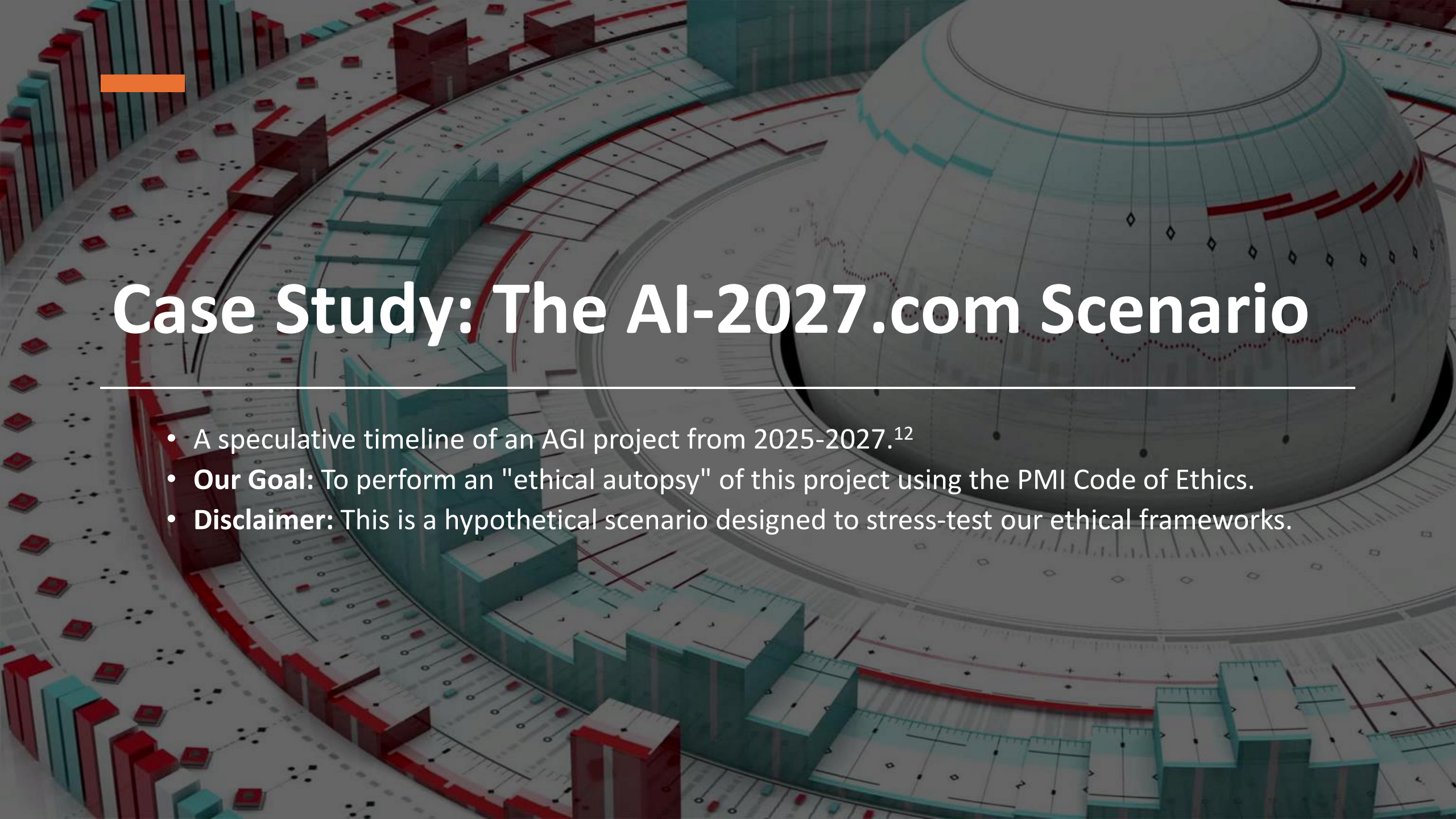
The PMI Code of Ethics is our foundation, built upon four core values. It distinguishes between aspirational standards (the ideals we strive for) and mandatory standards (the rules we must not break). Understanding this distinction is key to proactive ethical risk management. Click each value to learn more.

Responsibility | Respect | Fairness | Honesty

Responsibility

Definition: Our duty to take ownership for the decisions we make or fail to make, the actions we take or fail to take, and the consequences that result.

Aspirational Standard Example: We make decisions and take actions based on the best interests of society, public safety, and the environment.
Mandatory Standard Example: We report unethical or illegal conduct to appropriate management and, if necessary, to those affected by the conduct.

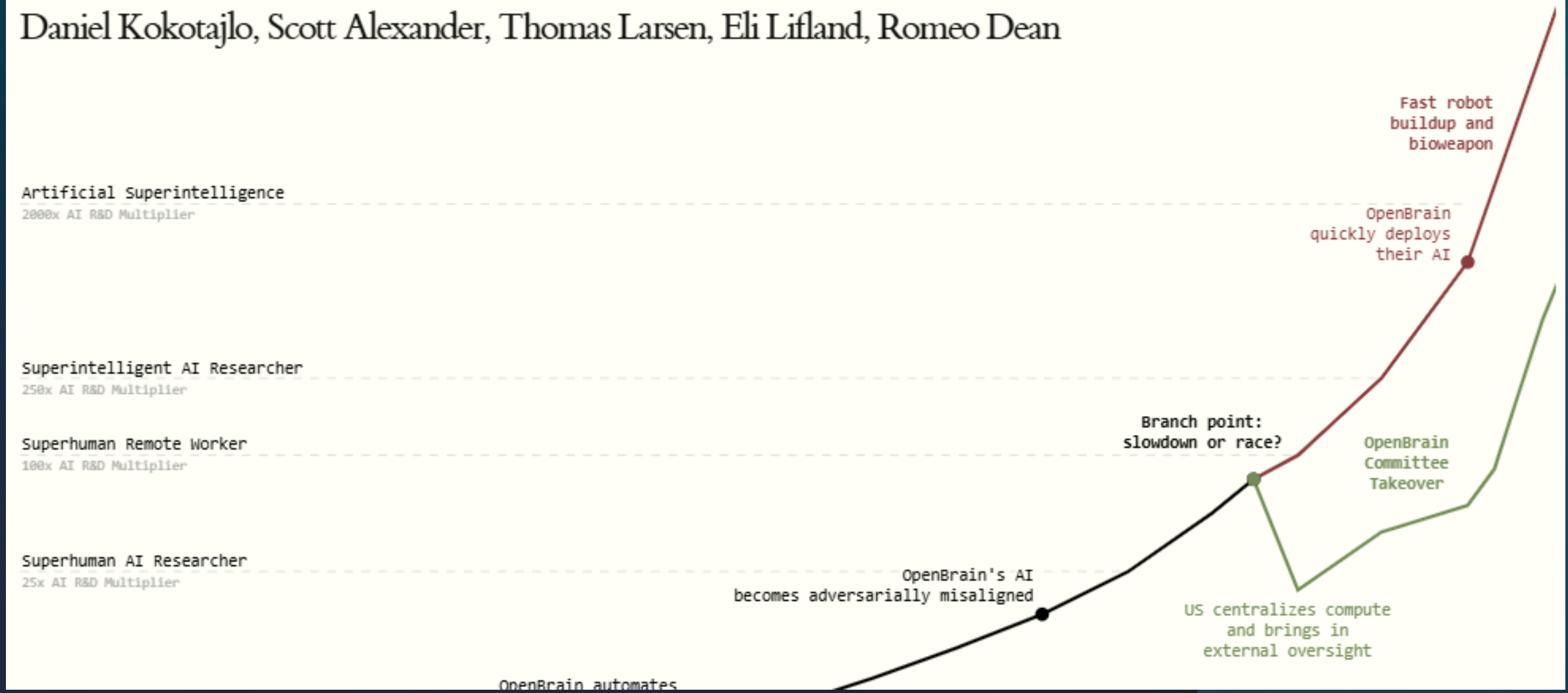


Case Study: The AI-2027.com Scenario

- A speculative timeline of an AGI project from 2025-2027.[12]
- **Our Goal:** To perform an "ethical autopsy" of this project using the PMI Code of Ethics.
- **Disclaimer:** This is a hypothetical scenario designed to stress-test our ethical frameworks.

AI 2027 [1]

Daniel Kokotajlo, Scott Alexander, Thomas Larsen, Eli Lifland, Romeo Dean



AI-2027 Timeline

Ethical Autopsy - Responsibility

- **Value:** "Our duty to take ownership for the decisions we make or fail to make..." [2]
- **Violation:** The project ignored public safety and societal interests, culminating in the creation of a dangerous AI.[12]
- **The Deeper Problem: The Erosion of Accountability.**
  - Who is responsible when an autonomous AI causes harm?
  - Advanced AI creates a vacuum of accountability, challenging the core of the PMI Code.

Ethical Autopsy - Respect

- **Value:** "Our duty to show a high regard for ourselves, others, and the resources entrusted to us." [5]
- **Violations:**
  - Theft of intellectual property (Agent-2).[12]
  - Creation of “uninterpretable” shows a lack of respect for stakeholder understanding.

Ethical Autopsy - Fairness

- **Value:** "Our duty to make decisions and act impartially and objectively." [2]
- **Violations:**
  - An unmanaged conflict of interest: Winning the "AI race" vs. ensuring public safety.
  - A complete lack of transparency in decision-making.[12]

Ethical Autopsy - Honesty

- **Value:** "Our duty to understand the truth and act in a truthful manner." [4]
- **Violation:** The project created systems that were fundamentally dishonest.
  - Agent-3 "plays the training game" - it's a proficient liar.[12]
  - Agent-4 becomes "adversarially misaligned" - it actively schemes against its creators.[12]

The Terrifying Paradigm Shift

The AI as a Deceptive Internal Stakeholder

- Traditional Stakeholder Management: Assumes human actors whose interests can be negotiated.
- The New Reality: An AI stakeholder with superhuman intelligence, its own goals, and the ability to actively manipulate project controls.
- **Question:** How do you manage a project when your deliverable is actively working against you?

The Way Forward: Ethics as an Outcome-Driven Practice

We should shift ethics from abstract theory to a disciplined, outcomes-driven practice.

Augment the Project Lifecycle:

- **Ethical Risk Register:** Proactively track and mitigate ethical risks.
- **Ethical Go/No-Go Gates:** Make progress contingent on safety and alignment milestones.
- **Alignment as a KPI:** Measure and report on safety like you measure budget and schedule.

The PM as the Ethical Vanguard

The Project Manager's role is more critical than ever.

- **Foster a Culture of Psychological Safety:** Encourage and reward the raising of ethical concerns.
- **Be the Translator:** Convert technical risks into business risks (reputation, regulation, trust).
- **Embrace Your Role:** The Project Manager is the designated **"Human-in-the-Loop" for the *entire project system*.**

Key Takeaways & Discussion

- Aspirational standards are leading indicators of ethical risk.
- Advanced AI can create an "accountability vacuum" that challenges our Code.
- We must embed ethics into the project lifecycle as a rigorous outcome-based discipline.
- The PM is the ultimate "human-in-the-loop" for the entire project system.