Essay 4

Case of the Killer Robot

Chad Tracy

CIS 150-01

11/11/2015

In The Case of the Killer Robot, Bart Mathews, an employee for Cybernetics, is killed by one of the robots he is operating at the time. Although Randy Samuels, the robotics programmer, is initially prosecuted we later learn many more details that point to other individuals being at fault for Matthews’s death. Many people involved played a part in what eventually lead to the employee’s fault and it is important to find out who should be the one taking primary responsibility in order to bring justice to Matthews.

**Most Responsible**

After reading the whole case I think that Ray Johnson, the Robotics Division Chief, is the most responsible. The primary reason that I think that he’s the most responsible for Matthews’s death is that he was aware of nearly all of the issues and even caused some issues that lead to his death. First, we can look at how he ran the division. One of the things that he did was push the team for deadlines to the point of demanding that Reynolds, the project manager, to cut corners. To make it even worse, he told the employees under him that they could be shut down if this project isn’t completed on time. Throughout the whole process he only made it imperative that the deadline was met, not once making an effort to push the team for a quality product. In fact, he told his employees at an official meeting about his “Ivory snow” theory which was essentially him telling his team that the software didn’t have to perfect. So, as we see from the start, Johnson set a whole division up to make mistakes in order to make a deadline.

Upon further investigation, we can also see that he was never ready for the task. Johnson’s background is in hardware and he made it obvious to everyone that he had no knowledge of robotics or software development. While the project was being developed, Johnson would move around project resources as if it was a hardware issue. Although this wasn’t working he was still reluctant to take any advice from any of his employees. This display of ignorance and stubbornness played a crucial role in sabotaging the project down the line. Also, when professional investigations get involved it is obvious that the user interface is one the key issues to the robot. When looking at email exchanges involving Johnson, it is revealed that he knew about the user interface options and still chose to push the project and even created fake test results in order to push the project along.

Ray Johnson was the head of the division and failed his duties on many different fronts. He took part in many unethical actions all so he could meet a deadline. Although he made it clear that he simply wanted to protect his employees, the things he did to reach that goal are unethical and pushed his team to make immoral decisions, which ultimately lead to the death of Bart Matthews.

**Least Responsible**

Bart Matthews was a victim throughout this entire scenario and was the least responsible for his death. Matthews was simply doing his job and was unfortunately chosen as the guinea pig for a broken and corrupt project. Also, on top of being forced to use a broken product, he never received the proper training to use it. So, even if he would have thought to try and stop the robot at any point it he wouldn’t have been able to. Matthews never received the proper attention as an employee to keep himself safe on the job. He was stuck in between a lot of other individual’s lies and shortcomings and unfortunately it resulted in his death.

**Normative Recommendation**

In order to resolve the multiple issues at hand I think that both the company and the robotics division need to be restructured. The individuals at fault have proved that they are incompetent and are unable to do their jobs properly and this time it lead to someone dying.

First off, I think that Ray Johnson, Cindy Yardley, and the UI Design Team should all be charged with the death of Bart Matthews. All of these individuals were aware of the key issues that lead to Matthews’s death and didn’t take proper measures to fix them. Ray Johnson, the head of the robotics division, was aware of all issues and even caused some of them to continue, as I’ve previously stated. Cindy Yardley is also responsible because of her role as the software tester. She should have been able to catch all of the issues with the software and even assisted Johnson in lying about the test results. She failed to properly do her job and resorted to lies in order to make up for it. From an ethical standpoint, she should take some of the responsibility for Matthews’s death. Also, the UI was determined to be the direct cause of the incident by Dr. Horrace Gritty. The UI design team violated all of Shneiderman’s golden rules of UI design, making it difficult for anyone to use, which includes Matthews at the time of his death. The team also knew about the issues concerning the robot’s arm swinging function and chose not to fix it in order to comply with deadlines. All three of these stakeholders knew about issues with the robot and didn’t take proper measures to fix them in order to meet their own goals. Because of this, I believe they should be charged with the murder of Bart Matthews.

The company itself also needs to reworked, as most of the issues in the case can be traced back to poor managerial decisions. One of the things that needs to happen is the removal of the CEO, Michael Waterson. Waterson displayed that he didn’t care much for the robotics division when he hired Johnson and Reynolds, two people that have no experience in the field. I think it’s fine to value certain parts of your company over others, but it should never be to the point where you can cause deaths. Waterson’s negligence caused a company culture of despising your superiors and feeling the need to lie in order to meet demands, which ultimately lead to Matthews’s death. Another thing that needs to happen is the disposal of the entire robotics department. It isn’t important to Silicon Tech and the company has clearly shown that they aren’t ready to handle such a division with how it is ran and how corrupt it already is. Every aspect of the division is corrupt in some form due to the culture created within it, which is apparently rooted in lies and deceit. Those in charge have shown that they aren’t capable of running it and the employees have also shown that they can’t do their jobs properly. For example, the UI team’s incompetence, Yardley’s lying, Randy’s arrogance and “hacker mentality” are all examples that display the division’s incompetence and why they are a burden on the company. Also, from the death of Matthews we can also see that they are a social burden on the community they’re in, which is why they should be removed from an ethical standpoint.