

### Who is Responsible?

The articles “80 Missing Computers at Nuke Lab: Watchdog” by AFP and “Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint ” by PC World bring to light the importance of ethics within computer systems. Facebook had the responsibility to protect their users private information and the Los Alamos National Laboratory had the responsibility of reporting the loss of computers that contained compromising information that may have been potentially dangerous. Both cooperation violated their ethical responsibility. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be to discuss the ethical implications within each article, how it relates to the ethical systems of the ACM and IEEE, and how the behaviors are not consistent with privacy and computer security.

In the article “80 Missing Computers at Nuke Lab: Watchdog” the employees were following the ethical process utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is defined as being “the useful is the good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences.” When the incident occurred at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, I believe the employees and the employer did not take the correct actions in dealing with the situation, therefore the employees and the employer were trying to maximize their happiness by not reporting the incident. This is due to if they were to report the actions they employees could have been endanger of being terminated. The reason for this is that for such an important facility that has stored information as well as produced it about nuclear devices, this was a national concern. Especially due to the overall severity of what could have happened if the information were to have fallen into the wrong hands.

In the article concerning The Los Alamos National Laboratory was proven to not follow the ACM(Association for Computing Machinery) code of ethics. The facility violated section 1.2 of the code which is avoiding harm to others. By not taking control over the situation sooner, the facility caused harm to the general public by not “[considering] potential impacts on all those affected by decisions made during design and implementation”. Furthermore not considering the general public could have caused an uproar due to people becoming worrisome over not knowing who had stolen the computers and would now possess this information. Employees specifically did not follow their “obligation to report any signs of system dangers that might result in serious personal or social damage”, also stated in section 1.2. The Los Alamos National Laboratory also failed to adhere to section 2.5 which states the facility and/or corporation must “Give comprehensive and thorough evaluations of computer systems and their impacts, including analysis of possible risks”. By not following imperative 2.5, the facility was forced to push blame onto management. Due to management lacking responsibility with reporting these contingencies, could have lead to an issue with national security. This leads to imperative 2.6 of the ACM which one must honor their assigned responsibilities. I believe that managements failure in following policies jeopardized their lives as well as a potential breach in national security. Though they did not honor the code of ethics, they do not stand alone other companies such as the for-profit corporation Facebook have the same problem.

Facebook is a for-profit networking site that follows an egotistical ethic because they are trying to make a profit off of users that use the site. In an article from PC World it reviewed an incident where Facebook attempted to change its privacy policy in order to share information to other companies for a profit. There was a backlash against Facebook which users banned together and objected to the for-

profit corporations demands that were stated in its privacy policy. On the Facebook site, users “own their information and control who they share it with”, which was stated by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's founder. Having stated this, Zuckerberg was trying to appeal to the public of a utilitarianistic standpoint that Facebook's users should face the consequences of not reviewing their account information. Facebook's ultimatum was that they provide a social networking site in which users have control over their information of what would go public or not. Though having this in regard if a person were to look up someone specifically by name in a search engine they may possibly find their profile picture by doing so and have a link back to them. This situation is a prime example of when a user uses Facebook and does not realize their information can be linked back to them by doing a specific action correlated with Facebook I feel as though Facebook is in its right to leave it up to the user because it would be inefficient for them to constantly overseeing be over viewing all of its users.

Facebook follows the IEEE(Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) by pushing responsibilities to the users. In their previous privacy policies they adhere to fifth imperative which states that they, Facebook, is responsible “to improve the understanding of technology, its appropriate application, and potential consequences”. What Zuckerberg means is that the users are responsible for which information does or doesn't get distributed. By stating that using specific applications in certain ways has its own potential consequences that are laid out. They also adhere to the seventh imperative of the IEEE by “seek[ing], accept[ing], and offer[ing] honest criticism of technical work, to acknowledge and correct errors, and to credit properly the contributions of others ”. Facebook heard to the calls of their users that were involved in the protest of Facebook changing its privacy policy and Facebook reverted back to their old terms of use. I feel as though this was a great decision on Facebook's part by

taking on that responsibility and adjusting back to what their users wanted. Though not long after, since Facebook is a for-profit corporation, they sought out another way to make a profit off of the users.

After Facebook agreed to reverting back to its old privacy policy it had a tool called “Beacon”. This created an uproar with users because this tool broadcast information about users “shopping habits and activities at other Web sites”. Therefore Facebook decided to allow users to turn off this tool which ultimately allowed users to be once again in control of what was allowed to be displayed to the public such as for other for-profit corporations. Since users now had the option to turn off this tool Facebook had to look for another way to make a profit off of its users. Facebook did this by slightly changing the policy agreements so that it would be in favor to make a profit. They did this in a way where if a user were to “delete” their account it would become free game for information to be distributed to the public. This egotistical action was noticed when The Consumerist's Chris Walters “stumbled upon the subtly shifted language” in the privacy policy. Facebook later attempted to explain as to why they warranted control over personal information. They made the excuse that “even if you were to delete your account, any messages you had sent to a friend would still remain in his inbox—so Facebook requires the expanded rights to make sure that could happen.” If a user were to deactivate their account they could reactivate it and it would be as though the user had never left.

Facebook users are in charge of the information they want to be distributed to companies as well as the public eye. Facebook claims this but soon after stopped notifying users when their terms of use had changed. By doing so they are avoiding the IEEE fifth imperative which contradicts what Facebook's previous actions were before. This is unethical for Facebook to change its terms of service without notifying users about the change beforehand. The reason for this is such as other applications

that are installed on a PC or mac there is a license agreement each time that the software is updated. I believe though Facebook should do this as well with their terms of service and privacy policies because it then follows the fifth imperative of IEEE by having its users continuously understanding the technology they are using. In the ACM code of ethics Facebook violates article 3.4 as follows “Ensure that users and those who will be affected by a system have their needs clearly articulated during the assessment and design of requirements; later the system must be validated to meet requirements”. Therefore without Facebook having a notification of its updated privacy policy it violates imperative 3.4 because they do not “clearly [articulate]” the changes that have been made to the system. If users do not know what has been changed then they would no longer be in full control of their account.

One could have the opposition that responsibility for the corporation is solely reliant on management due management having control over the corporation, though this opposition is not true. The reason as to why this objection is untrue is that corporations are ran by both management and its employees. This is due to if management were to have full control over a corporation without considering its employees or the users of its products; the corporation would have a downfall. This downfall would be caused by employees and users protesting against the company if there were to be anything that would be unjust. This would cause the corporation to loose money.

In conclusion for-profit corporations, when they are new, follow ethical systems as well as either the ACM or the IEEE code of ethics. Though as time goes on these corporations stray away from what they do that should be deemed correct by secular society. I feel as though if there were to be any improvement with these for-profit corporations the employees have to

partake in doing what is deemed right and correcting both their actions and that of their employers for a better outcome for the corporation.

Work Cited

1. ACM Council, (1992). ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Retrieved January 23, 2012, from Association for Computing Machinery Web site:
2. IEEE council. IEEE Code of Ethics. Retrieved January 25, 2012, from The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers website:
3. Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint . (Tue Feb 17,2009). PC World, Inline Citation -- ( Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint., Tue Feb 17,2009)
4. Retrieved February 3, 2012, from www.merriam-webster.com/
5. 80 Missing Computers at Nuke Lab: Watchdog . (Feb 13, 2009 ). San Francisco (AFP), Inline Citation -- ( 80 Missing Computers at Nuke Lab: Watchdog, Feb 13, 2009)