# Professional Ethics in Computing: Seminar 2 answer guide

(1) Who are the agents in this scenario?

1. Abby: intern at the software company.
2. Bella: intern at the software company.
3. Cassy: line manager.
4. The software company.

(2) Did Abby do anything wrong?

If Bella was wrong to copy code, then Abby was right to raise this concern with her line manager.

However, the way that Abby did this is wrong. By raising the issue in an open meeting, she is being confrontational and is deliberately embarrassing Bella. This does not help with determining if Bella's actions were wrong, nor helps Cassy resolve the situation.

An appropriate way to deal with this is to report the issue to Cassy confidentially, and request that Cassy, as line manager, raises the issue with Bella.

Also, Abby has taken it upon herself to decide that Bella is wrong without proper investigation. If the code that Bella copied is in the public domain and open source, then perhaps Bella has not done anything wrong, depending on the software company policy.

(3) What do the ethical theories you have learned in Lecture 3 tell us about this, if anything?

Here are some suggestions; there are more!

- Deontological ethics (universal law of nature and principle of the end in itself);

Suppose we have the universal law, "It is OK to copy any code in the public domain", then this means that any code made available on public sites such as GitHub has no protection, which is unfair and means that the onus is on the software developer in order to provide security of code to ensure ownership.

The principle of end in itself means keeping people as central goal. When Abby raised the issue in the open meeting, she showed no consideration for Bella's feelings and was only concerned with pursuing what she thinks is "right". She should have considered Bella's (and other's) feelings when taking action.

- Contractarianism;

There is an implicit social contract between interns and Abby broke this. She could have spoken to Bella about her actions first.

There is a contract with the software company, which might mean that external code cannot be used, in which case Bella broke this.

If Abby or Bella are members of a professional body such as BCS, they may have breached professional code. For example, by being confrontational, Abby has breached code to show respect to colleagues.

- Utilitarianism;

By re-using code, Bella is surely saving her company money and time re-developing the code. On the other hand, the original development company has potentially lost property (and sales?) by this action. Bella has

made herself and her manager happy (at least whilst he does not know). On the other hand, this may have a negative impact on other staff who may lose out because they are not as successful as Bella. Arguably, Abby has created unhappiness by exposing the issue, and the way she has done this. However, the problem for utilitarianism is how to weigh the relative costs of each of these aspects.

- Ethics of caring.

    According to Nodding's ethics of care, we all have a responsibility of care for people we work with (have a relationship with). Arguably, Abby has been uncaring to Bella by raising the issue in the way she did. She also made the situation difficult for Cassy to manage following the revelation in the open meeting.

    Also, arguably, perhaps Bella was uncaring by copying code without consideration for her fellow interns around her and how they may feel about her "cheating". She could have consulted them first.