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12/2/18
CPRE 394

Ethics

Everyday huge technical advances are being made that have major impacts on the world and its society. With this in mind, being an engineer, it is important to take in all perspectives of a problem and to follow a strict "Code of Ethics". Because ethics are so deeply involved and complex it is important that we utilize a common Code of Ethics so that we prevent harmful adverse effects from having variations on what the "right thing" means to an individual. However, following the Code of Ethics should be a baseline to strive for. Being an engineer means going above and beyond in doing the right thing in a situation.

Ethical issues vary greatly but all essentially come down to a conflict of interest that breaks one or more of the set guidelines in a Code of Ethics. When faced with an ethical issue, I believe you need to sit down and really go through all of the variables that are involved with a situation, no important decision should be made in a hurry. If you can't think of the right solution to an answer give it a night to think it over. Take time to understand what the ethical issue is, and how things are conflicting with each other. Doing this is extremely important as an issue that, on the surface might seem to have a simple and straightforward solution might overlook minute details that can have lasting effects on society and more importantly the people in it. While at the same time and going through the seemingly impossible issue to resolve can help to highlight options that again, would have otherwise been overlooked.

While in small groups in our Cpre 394 class we took the time to go over a couple situations where an ethical issue was presented. One of them was where a computer scientist was assisting an organization named SMART Research group. He was helping to build a database of all job related injuries to paramedics. When building that database he received that violated the U.S. Privacy act but the SMART group want him to include the information anyways.

Dr. Stoytchev lead the conversation by asking a simple question of "what would you do in this situation?" The obvious right thing to do is to refuse putting that information in the database, but there might be a lot of uncertainties that you might have to deal with. The big one being losing your job, but when discussed Stoychev mentioned that when looking at all your options you need to look not just at our current position in your current time, but how this would

affect things in the future. Doing the easy thing wouldn't get you in trouble in your current time and would help you keep your job. But things catch up with you, making getting in much bigger trouble in the future a lot more possible, these things including jail time. Another student made a point that you should take the issue to the company's in house ethics department and document all interactions for future use, most companies have them to prevent issues like this from happening because of the fall outs that can happen. So our group made the joint decision that doing the right thing of report the ethical issue to the company was in the run, the better idea.

Reviewing the six virtues of ethics, three stood out to me as most relevant in this situation "integrity", "fidelity", and "responsibility". Fidelity was violated because these employees put their trust into acts such as the U.S. Privacy act that their private information will not be shared with 3rd parties and used against them. Integrity was violated when the company decided to go outside of the law to maliciously gather information on employees that could affect them in very negative ways. Finally, responsibility was violated as the company has a responsibility to not take advantage of, outside of the laws methods of gathering data again affecting the employees in a possibly very negative way.

Obviously all of the six virtues are important to follow but these three stood out the most for this situation. Self-discipline was also very important and would follow right after the first three virtues as SMART very clearly did not follow any self-discipline in gather more data then was legally allowed from their employees. Charity and Honesty were less important in this as the boss was honest with his intention while they were malicious and I'm not sure how charity really fits into this situation. I think that the Six virtues pretty much cover what was violated in this ethical issue in that they overstepped their bounds and didn't care about what effect it would have on the people and the information that they collected on.