

CS #3: Email Read Receipts (Discussion Reflection)

Libo Zhang (lz200)

Question 1 Answer:

During group discussion, basically we all agreed that the GeniusMail company should have a responsibility to the recipients of GeniusMail emails. However, we had different perspectives about whether individuals (including the CTO, the CEO, and the lead engineer) of GeniusMail executives should take such responsibility. Other members in my group think that these executives should not take responsibilities in an individually personal way, because they are still employees of GeniusMail company, and designing product features is just their job. However, I disagree with this idea. I think executives of GeniusMail should also individually take an ethical responsibility to GeniusMail recipients, because the executives of one company always represent the interests of the entire company. If the public has transparency and privacy concerns about the GeniusMail product, which has been proved to be published by the GeniusMail executives, then it is certainly reasonable that these executives should take the responsibility.

Question 2 Answer:

I had many shared perspectives with other group members, one perspective I find very interesting is that we all agree what the lead engineer said (something like “if users do not like GeniusMail, then do not use GeniusMail”), should be to blame. We all think such speech is very irresponsible and unacceptable either to the public users or to the GeniusMail company. For potential users of GeniusMail, this imprudent idea will increase their ethical concerns. For the GeniusMail company, the lead engineer’s speech actually does not help address any problems. We had the shared perspective that the lead engineer’s motivation is very bad.

Question 3 Answer:

To describe my impressions of the advantages of a virtue ethics framework for ethical reasoning, I want to use the GeniusMail CEO’s motivations as the foundation. The CEO would make compromise to update the read receipts feature, the most explicit advantage is to help address public concerns and criticism, and GeniusMail indeed received positive feedbacks after doing so. I think there is another advantage such that, after receiving positive feedbacks, more people might prefer GeniusMail, and the competence of GeniusMail in the business can be increased. Finally, I do believe caring about ethical reasoning all the time itself is an advantage, because this means that we do care much about other people.

Question 4 Answer:

To describe my impressions of the disadvantages of a virtue framework for ethical reasoning, I also want to start with the GeniusMail CEO's motivations. The CEO insisted that compromise should be made to address ethical concerns, even at the cost of losing product competence in the business market. Therefore, I think one disadvantage is that if we can not balance the trade-off between ethical reasoning and commercial reasoning, the result can be really bad. As the case study shows in the end, GeniusMail still receives some criticism because there is still a "root problem" about not completely deleting the read receipts feature. However, we can also imagine that if the feature is entirely removed from GeniusMail, the decrease of product competence will make GeniusMail lose money. Therefore, I think such a dilemma is indeed a disadvantage of a virtue framework for ethical reasoning.

Question 5 Answer:

On the one hand, I would prefer to draw on a consequentialist framework when I need to make some decisions for myself or for a small group including myself, because I clearly realize that being a consequentialist might eventually lead to ethical concerns to some extent. Therefore, what I want to do here is trying to minimize the possibly negative effects caused by such concerns. On the other hand, I would prefer to draw on a virtue ethics framework when I need to make some decisions which might influence a lot of people, because I have to seriously take public concerns into consideration. For example, if I am also one of the executives of GeniusMail, I would certainly agree with the CEO's motivations because she would make compromise to address the transparency and privacy concerns from the recipients of GeniusMail emails. All in all, I always think highly of the ethical reasoning for the public.