Essay 3 – Case of the killer robot

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Following review of The Case of Killer Robots, I’ve deduced the most responsible contributor to the death of Bart Mathews. I’ve chosen Ray Johnson (Robotics Division Chief) based on many different factors such as accepting falsified test results, misuse of managerial duties, and his unwillingness to work as a team. In order to properly examine the influence that Ray Johnson had in Bart Mathew’s death, we must first acknowledge that all the parties involved played a role in it and that without Ray Johnson’s influence, it probably wouldn’t have happened.

Firstly, Cindy Yardley (Software Tester) did produce false test results of the software written by the programmer; but only because she was specifically instructed by Ray Johnson to do so. Johnson’s directive to compromise Yardley’s job results is a blatant act of suppression to safety precaution, and in no helps the prevention of Bart Mathew’s death – it enables it. Without the unethical instruction provided by Ray Johnson, Cindy Yardley would not have fabricated the results of the software test, and she would have found the software bug that ultimately resulted in Bart Mathew’s death.

Secondly, Ray Johnson’s unscrupulous managing practices extended pass Cindy Yardley, and onto the entire Robotics Division for which he was in charge of. Ray Johnson was known to stage meetings in order to discuss his “Ivory Snow Theory”, which is a simple anecdote that he uses in order to prove his idea that “perfect software is an oxymoron”. These meetings created an atmosphere of mediocre, and lax software production. Behavioral management happens from the top down, and for his employees to see, and ultimately imitate, his unethical perspective towards the development of software was a major role in the death of Bart Mathews.

Thirdly, Ray Johnson was purporting that Sam Reynolds was unfit to be the project manager, most likely to the widely held suspicion that Johnson didn’t like him. This action would ultimately result in fueling the unstable work environment that led to the mismanagement of the resources of the team. Ray Johnson would be directly instructing employees that are hierarchically supposed to report to Sam Reynolds, which forced employees onto pressures stemming from an unprofessional environment, which obviously doesn’t help the employees make rational decisions guarding their work. In this regard, Ray Johnson has effectively created a workplace environment that created confusion, chaos, and drove its major components into the reasons behind Bart Mathew’s death.

For the least responsible entity regarding Bart Mathew’s death, I have chosen Michael Waterson (CEO of Silicon Techtronics) for his degrees of separation from the actual causes of Bart Mathew’s death, as well as his ethical actions following the indictment of Randy Samuels (programmer). Again, to clarify before explaining his responsible character, Michael Waterson is not without contributing cause to Mathew’s death; it’s simply an argument to determine his position in being the most minimal impact in the tragedy.

To begin, many would argue that Waterson’s act of simply moving Reynolds into the CX30 project from his other job, instead of hiring a new programmer was cost-cutting method that could have stopped Mathew’s death. However, this argument is a fleshy, unsubstantiated, and ill-conceived. Waterson’s motive in that action was for efficiency regarding the wellbeing of the profit-maximizing nature of the company. Waterson had no way of foreseeing the tragic events of Bart’s Death stemming from the departmental change of one programmer; whom I might add was given a great promotion. Waterson’s intent was for Reynolds to receive the proper instruction under the project manager, and the division chief – which as we know from earlier, is a failed assumption.

Waterson is primarily my candidate for the least responsible simply because he is on the last of the list of the accused. All the parties involved in this case had closer actions, based on impact and reaction, on Bart Mathew’s death. Another way to put it, all other parties we’re one step away from influencing the situation while Waterson’s position as CEO naturally separated himself from these operational processes. This is true in almost all businesses.

My normative recommendation for all the parties in this case is simple; act ethically. If the employees, and the managers involved in Bart’s Death would’ve acted ethically in all aspects of their jobs, then Bart Mathews would still be alive.

This is quite an easy, and simple resolution for this case because the trails of unethical decisions all lead to Bart Mathew’s death. I would also argue that a main cause of these unethical decisions stem from upper management, namely Ray Johnson. Unethical behavior that is deemed acceptable, and encouraged by upper management is more likely to be followed than the like from co-workers. As stated before, behavior of management dictates the atmosphere that the employees work in and affects everything they do in the workplace. Ray Johnson’s unethical creation of this toxic environment, and his actions of drawing-in and trapping employees, is precisely the reason why Bart Mathews is dead.

In order to combat these issues, I would further expand on my normative issue of acting ethically, to cover the explicit and professional actions of upper management into facilitating an environment where employees can act ethically. This especially important in this case because Cindy Yardley (software tester) was found to have deep ethical dilemmas regarding the instructions of covering up the test results by Johnson; and if she had the environment as just described, she would be able to act on those dilemmas, and not dispose of the results. An ethically-positive environment would’ve allowed Yardley, and many other employees, to make decisions that could’ve prevented the Mathew’s death.

Acting ethically would not only surmise the existence of our ethical dilemma, but it would also provide a structure for positive growth in the company’s future. In doing so, the company would have a built-in integrity that basically provides their customers that the internal processes of the company would be beneficial for everyone involved and that no compromise in duty would be exchanged to risk safety. For outside customers looking to do business with a responsibly mindful company, they have their perfect candidate right here.

This would have a compounding reaction in itself simply because by having that quality of service and product, the company is able to build a strong reputation around it. This would benefit the marketing standpoint of the company because it would be a beacon to potential consumers that want a high-quality service/product, from a strong company. The result for the future of the company is growth, because having that kind of reputation brings in business for the long run (which also satisfies the dilemma faced by Waterson in cost-savings). So not only is this normative recommendation better for the overall well-being of the corporation, but it also prevents the death of Bart Mathews, and corrects the unethical environment that contributed to it.

In summation, my normative recommendation acts as a simple top-down, inside-out structure of ethical behavior and environment. That of which results in the prevention of the tragic death of Bart Mathews; a preventable death indeed.