

UNSW

ELEC4122

Term 1, 2019

Activity Week 3

Engineering & Whistleblowing

This tutorial explores the ethical dilemma of whistleblowing: formally known as “unauthorised disclosure of privileged information.” You may understand why it causes strong emotional reactions in people.

Whistleblowing is much in the news. Although the Federal Government increased penalties for reporting any material released by whistleblowers, media outlets still discussed reports from detention centres, wikileaks, etc. So then the law-makers tried to make possession of material illegal. Julian Assange remains in Ecuador’s Embassy in London; Edward Snowden is in Russia. Why do some people risk so much to tell secrets?

Political whistleblowing tends to get most publicity, but Engineering, too, has a distinguished roll of whistleblowers. Perhaps the most celebrated example involved the space shuttle. A few years ago, engineers rated highly as whistleblowers¹. Although Snowden himself is a technologist, who needed to be trusted with secrets in order to do his job, his whistleblowing did not involve technology faults but, as he saw it, the mis-use of a technology.

Preparation

Read the associated material about whistleblowing, released on moodle. *Why is whistleblowing a moral dilemma?*

During Class

Again this tutorial is based around a video: *Nice Guys Finish Last* (Titus Films, 1994), shown on *True Stories*, ABC TV, 8.30 pm, Sunday 24 July, 1994.

You will work initially in teams of THREE people.

This week’s out-of-class questions

1. *Explain what is meant by whistleblowing. Under what circumstances is whistleblowing generally seen as an ethical action?*
2. *In about 100 words, explain whether you agree or disagree with the following idea: Anonymous web-based information distribution has made whistleblowing, easier.*

THE FINE PRINT

This tutorial activity is designed to help students understand the idea of an ethical dilemma and whistleblowing in particular.

¹online.wsj.com/articles/meet-the-secs-6-500-whistleblowers-1406591157