COURSE TITLE: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

COURSE CODE: EA-219

ASSIGNMENT

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1. Selling User Data Without Consent

Scenario

A popular fitness app collects user health data, including sleep patterns, physical activity, and dietary habits. To boost revenue, the company decides to sell this data to third-party advertisers without obtaining explicit user consent. This move could potentially increase revenue but risks breaching user trust and privacy.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company prioritize profit over user consent and privacy?
2. How might selling data without consent affect the company's reputation?
3. What legal consequences could arise from this approach?

Solutions

1. The company should prioritize user consent over profit to maintain trust and ethical standards. An opt-in system would allow users to control their data while respecting privacy. This way, the company can still generate revenue without violating user rights.
2. Selling data without consent could lead to significant public backlash, harming the company's reputation. It may lead to loss of users, negative media coverage, and long-term damage to brand value. Transparency and communication could reduce some of these risks.
3. The company risks legal penalties under privacy regulations like GDPR and CCPA. Violating these laws could result in hefty fines, legal action, and a damaged public image. Compliance with privacy laws is essential to avoid these consequences.

2. Whistleblowing in Government or Corporate Corruption

Scenario

A government agency faces a financial scandal as public funds are allegedly diverted toward unauthorized personal projects. There's a question of whether a whistleblower should come forward, but whistleblowing risks revealing sensitive details that could destabilize trust in the agency.

Problem Statement

1. Is it better to protect the agency's reputation or prioritize public accountability?
2. How can the whistleblower ensure their own safety if they disclose this information?
3. Could public awareness of the misuse of funds lead to positive reform, or cause more harm?

Solutions

1. The whistleblower should prioritize public accountability, as exposing corruption can lead to reforms and public trust. Protecting the agency's reputation at the cost of integrity undermines ethical standards.
2. The whistleblower can report anonymously or through secure channels to minimize risk. Consulting whistleblower protection agencies ensures proper legal safeguards and confidentiality.
3. Public awareness of the misuse of funds could lead to reforms, but it might also cause immediate turmoil or backlash. The benefits of transparency often outweigh the risks of continued corruption.

3. <u>Social Media Influence on Elections</u>

<u>Scenario</u>

During election season, a social media platform's algorithm increasingly promotes sensational and polarizing content, heavily influencing public opinion. This biased exposure raises concerns about the platform's role in shaping democratic outcomes.

<u>Problem Statement</u>

1. Should the platform balance content to prevent political bias?
2. How can the company handle accusations of algorithmic interference in politics?
3. Would transparency about the algorithm's design help alleviate concerns?
4. What ethical responsibility does the platform have to safeguard democracy?

<u>Solutions</u>

1. The platform should adjust the algorithm to promote diverse, fact-checked content, preventing any single political ideology from dominating. This ensures fair and balanced exposure.
2. The company could establish an independent committee to audit the algorithm regularly for bias and make adjustments as needed. This would help address accusations of interference.
3. Transparency about how the algorithm works would reduce suspicion and build trust with users, ensuring they understand how content is prioritized.
4. The platform has an ethical responsibility to avoid influencing elections unduly by promoting divisive content. It should focus on providing a balanced, factual information stream.

4. Data Privacy in Healthcare

Scenario

A healthcare research institution decides to share patient data with a third-party analytics company for research purposes. The data includes information that, if not fully anonymized, could risk patient privacy.

Problem Statement

1. Should patient data be shared at the expense of privacy for research benefits?
2. Can the institution ensure data is truly anonymized before sharing it?
3. How should they address potential patient concerns over data privacy?

Solutions

1. The institution should prioritize patient privacy by ensuring data is fully anonymized before sharing it for research. This maintains ethical standards while allowing research to proceed.
2. The institution must implement rigorous anonymization processes and regularly audit data to ensure no identifiable information is included.
3. Transparent communication with patients and obtaining informed consent can address privacy concerns, giving them control over whether their data is shared.

5. Fast Fashion and Labor Ethics

Scenario

A fast-fashion company sources products from overseas suppliers known for low wages and poor working conditions. This model keeps production costs down, allowing the company to offer low-priced products and maintain high profits. However, labor conditions are in question.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company prioritize low production costs or ethical labor practices?
2. How would improving worker conditions affect the company's profitability?
3. Could investing in ethical labor practices improve brand reputation?

Solutions

1. The institution should prioritize patient privacy by ensuring data is fully anonymized before sharing it for research. This maintains ethical standards while allowing research to proceed.
2. The institution must implement rigorous anonymization processes and regularly audit data to ensure no identifiable information is included.
3. Transparent communication with patients and obtaining informed consent can address privacy concerns, giving them control over whether their data is shared.

6. Employee Layoffs and Executive Bonuses

Scenario

A large corporation is planning widespread employee layoffs while simultaneously allocating substantial bonuses to its executives. This raises ethical questions regarding the fairness of resource distribution within the company.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company prioritize layoffs for cost-cutting or reduce executive bonuses instead?
2. How would layoffs impact remaining employees' morale and trust?
3. Could public knowledge of executive bonuses harm the company's reputation?

Solutions

1. The company could reduce executive bonuses to prioritize job retention and demonstrate solidarity with employees during tough times.
2. Layoffs may lower morale, leading to decreased productivity and trust. Offering counseling and support programs could help mitigate this.
3. Public awareness of large executive bonuses during layoffs could result in negative media attention and damage the company's reputation, potentially leading to boycotts or protests.

7. Freedom of Speech vs. Hate Speech on Social Media

Scenario

A social media platform is facing criticism for failing to regulate hate speech while upholding free speech. The platform wants to maintain an open environment but is under pressure to address harmful content, which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups.

Problem Statement

1. How should the platform balance free speech with preventing harm from hate speech?
2. Can restricting hate speech lead to accusations of censorship?
3. What policies should be in place to maintain a safe environment?

Solutions

1. The platform could establish clear guidelines that distinguish between hate speech and legitimate free speech, ensuring transparency and fairness in enforcement.
2. While restricting hate speech is necessary to prevent harm, it may invite accusations of censorship. The platform must communicate its rationale and ensure consistency.
3. A comprehensive policy should include reporting tools, community moderation, and a dedicated team to assess and act on hate speech claims, ensuring a safe space for all users.

8. Manipulating Supply Chain for Profit

Scenario

A major retailer stocks up on essential items during a crisis, creating artificial scarcity that raises prices significantly. This strategy leads to higher profits but sparks consumer frustration and concerns about corporate responsibility.

Problem Statement

1. Should the retailer prioritize profit or ensure fair access to products?
2. How might manipulating supply chains affect public perception of the company?
3. What alternative practices could maintain fair market practices?

Solutions

1. The retailer should prioritize fair access to products by maintaining reasonable prices, avoiding exploiting crisis situations for profit.
2. Manipulating supply chains may lead to negative public perception, damaging trust and customer loyalty. Transparency about pricing strategies could mitigate this impact.
3. The retailer could limit the quantity per customer, ensuring that more people have access to essential products while preventing price gouging.

9. Gambling Advertisements Targeting Low-Income Areas

Scenario

A gambling company directs most of its advertisements toward low-income neighborhoods, capitalizing on individuals' financial hardships. While this drives up profits, it raises ethical concerns about exploiting vulnerable communities.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company focus on profitability or consider social responsibility?
2. How might targeting low-income areas affect the company's reputation?
3. What are the social implications of encouraging gambling among financially vulnerable populations?

Solutions

1. The company could shift its advertising focus to a broader audience, ensuring they do not disproportionately target vulnerable communities for profit.
2. Targeting low-income areas could harm the company's reputation, as it may be seen as exploiting financial hardship. Transparency and ethical advertising could help mitigate this.
3. Encouraging gambling in vulnerable areas can lead to increased addiction and financial strain, contributing to deeper social inequalities. Responsible marketing practices should be implemented.

10. Manipulating Political Algorithms

Scenario

A tech company adjusts its social media algorithm to promote content from certain political groups, influencing public opinion during elections. Although this benefits certain stakeholders, it compromises the platform's neutrality.

Problem Statement

1. Should the algorithm remain neutral, or can adjustments be justified?
2. How does this manipulation affect public trust in the platform?
3. Could transparent algorithmic adjustments rebuild trust?

Solutions

1. The algorithm should remain neutral to avoid accusations of bias and ensure fairness. Adjustments to promote specific groups may undermine the platform's credibility. Neutrality helps preserve trust across all user demographics.
2. Manipulating political content can severely damage public trust, especially if users believe the platform is supporting one ideology. This can lead to backlash, decreased engagement, and users abandoning the platform. Rebuilding trust will be challenging and time-consuming.
3. Transparency about algorithmic changes, along with clear communication on how content is selected, can rebuild trust. Providing users with control over their feeds ensures fairness and limits perceived manipulation. Regular audits of algorithms can demonstrate accountability.

11. Pharmaceutical Pricing for Life-Saving Drugs

Scenario

A pharmaceutical company considers a price increase for a life-saving drug. While this would maximize profits, it could make the drug inaccessible for low-income patients who rely on it.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company prioritize revenue or maintain drug affordability?
2. How would a price hike impact public opinion and trust?
3. Could alternative funding help maintain accessibility for low-income patients?

Solutions

1. The company could implement a tiered pricing model, where lower-income patients pay less, ensuring the drug remains accessible. This would maintain both profitability and affordability.
2. A price increase could damage public opinion and erode trust in the company, especially among vulnerable groups. The backlash could lead to consumer boycotts and regulatory scrutiny.
3. Alternative funding, such as partnerships with nonprofits or government programs, could subsidize costs for low-income patients. This would help balance the company's profitability with social responsibility.

12. Climate Change Mitigation: Economic Costs vs. Environmental Benefits

Scenario

A government debates a costly climate initiative that could significantly reduce carbon emissions but strain the economy, especially affecting jobs in energy-dependent sectors. Weighing economic stability against long-term environmental impact is crucial.

Problem Statement

1. Should economic stability or environmental responsibility take precedence?
2. Can the initiative be implemented without drastic economic consequences?
3. How might the public respond to such a policy shift?

Solutions

1. A balanced approach, where economic stability is safeguarded through gradual policy shifts, can help minimize job losses in affected sectors.
2. The government could offer tax incentives and subsidies to ease the transition for companies, ensuring eco-friendly practices become more financially viable.
3. Public awareness campaigns could emphasize the long-term benefits, such as improved health and sustainable job creation, to gain broader support for the policy.

13. Artificial Intelligence Bias

Scenario

An AI tool for recruitment displays patterns of bias against certain demographic groups. Though the tool streamlines hiring, its discrimination risks legal and reputational issues for the company.

Problem Statement

1. Should the company continue using the AI tool or halt it until biases are addressed?
2. What are the consequences of biased hiring for workplace diversity?
3. How could algorithm adjustments mitigate discrimination?

Solutions

1. The company should halt the AI tool temporarily to address biases and ensure fairness in the recruitment process. This step would reduce potential legal risks. Adjustments could be made to avoid discrimination in future hiring decisions.
2. Biased hiring practices can lead to a lack of diversity, reducing workplace innovation and inclusivity. This may also result in legal challenges and public backlash. A homogeneous workforce can harm a company's culture and reputation.
3. Algorithm adjustments could include removing biased data or incorporating fairness constraints into the system. Regular audits of the algorithm's decision-making could help identify and mitigate biases. Involving diverse teams in algorithm design can also reduce discrimination.