

Initial Post

The Q Industries case study demonstrates severe ethical violations through both the ACM Code of Ethics and BCS Code of Conduct, revealing critical professional failures with significant legal and social implications (ACM, 2024).

Ethical Violations and Code Comparisons

Q Industries' progression to lethal autonomous weapons fundamentally violates ACM Principle 1.2 (avoid harm) and Principle 1.1 (protect human rights), particularly freedoms of speech and association (Association for Computing Machinery, 2018). Facial recognition deployment at protests demonstrates algorithmic bias, with research showing substantially higher error rates for marginalised groups (Hassanin, 2023).

The BCS Code similarly condemns these actions. Section 1(a) requires "due regard for public health, privacy, security and wellbeing", which automated weaponry directly contravenes. Section 1(c) prohibits discrimination, yet facial recognition systems are demonstrably biased (BCS, 2022).

Legal and Social Implications

International humanitarian law requires meaningful human control over targeting decisions. UK law provides substantial protection for whistleblowers through the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The engineers' concerns constitute legitimate public interest disclosures, and PIDA protections prevent dismissal for whistleblowing despite Q's contractual lawsuit (Davison, 2018, pp. 5–18).

Both codes emphasise professional responsibility beyond contractual obligations. ACM Principle 2.7 requires fostering public awareness, whilst BCS Section 4(e) obligates supporting whistleblowers.

Critical Conclusion

However, this case exposes a fundamental weakness in professional ethics codes: they lack enforcement mechanisms with genuine deterrent power. Whilst the resigning

engineers acted admirably, Q Industries faces no meaningful sanctions beyond reputational damage. Without regulatory oversight, financial penalties, or criminal liability for ethical breaches, codes remain aspirational rather than binding. The computing profession must urgently advocate for statutory backing of ethical principles, transforming them from voluntary guidelines into enforceable legal standards that genuinely protect public interest over corporate profit.

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