

CPRE-394 – Ethics Essay

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The Code of Ethics is a document that is often mentioned but overlooked as an essential document. At the same time, some of the Code of Ethics topics may seem self-explanatory. The Code of Ethics is still necessary because it provides an overview of what an ethical engineer should look like today. Also, following the Code of Ethics is vital in maintaining a productive, safe, and efficient working environment for everyone.

When reading the Code of Ethics, it may be difficult to see the real-life application of the rule and its actual meaning. For example, Rule 1 says “to accept responsibility in making decisions consistent with the safety, health, and welfare of the public, and to disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment.” This rule means that we should make decisions that put the safety of the public first and then disclose any risks so that the public can make an informed decision about whether to use our product. For example, when making toys for children. We should make design choices that reduce the number of small parts children could choke on. Then, warn the consumer about the risk of choking so they can make an informed decision. Another example is when making food industrially for consumers. When making food, certain design choices are made in a factory to reduce the risk of allergens entering the food during creation. Then, if this is unavoidable, clearly state this on the container of the food, stating which allergens are at risk of being in the food. While these seem cut-and-dry decisions sometimes, they are not that easy.

When faced with an ethical dilemma, there are many things to consider. For example, how will this affect me in the future? Or how will this affect others around me in the future? When

weighing these options, the Code of Ethics can be helpful. If the Code of Ethics has a rule for something like my situation, I can use it to help make my decision. Consider this situation: a student offers me tickets to an Iowa State football game in exchange for my giving them a higher lab score. Here, the immediate benefit for me is significant. However, the long-term cost is potentially losing my job. Also, consider the impact on others. Other people would get cheated by having to work each week for the lab while this other person is free to do what they want. Then, after considering these options, I can look at the Code of Ethics and see that Rule 4 says, “Reject bribery in all its forms.” Then, I would decide not to take those tickets and move on. This was a hypothetical situation, but there are plenty of examples of ethical dilemmas in real life.

In our readings for the ethics module, we were given a few options of texts to read. The article I chose was an ethical dilemma involving Amazon’s Echo. The premise of the article was that someone was murdered, and the suspect had an Echo in their home. The police demanded that the Echo data be handed over because it could provide crucial evidence against the suspect. A few Codes of Ethics rules came into consideration when Amazon decided if they would hand over the information. The most pressing rule was Rule 9: “To avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious action.” Here, Amazon does not want to use that data. They have to hurt the suspect’s reputation without knowing whether he is guilty. So, Amazon demanded that the police provide the proper documentation to get the data from the Echo. At the same time, it may be tempting to demand that Amazon hand over the data right away to solve the case faster. It is good news that Amazon follows these checks and balances when using your data in a court of law. Overall, this case was a great example of the layers that come with real-world ethical dilemmas.

The Code of Ethics is an important document to create a baseline for engineers to follow in the workplace. Sometimes, we beat a dead horse with all these ethics courses in our engineering program. While we may talk about it quite a lot, talking about these ethical dilemmas can help us better prepare daily decisions for where there are daily decisions we must make that impact our future.