

Ethics

As engineers, our work will to one degree or another touch the lives of many people and have consequences on our environment. This means that, through our work, we have a measurable impact on this world. This impact may certainly be a positive one, but it can also be negative and thus must not be taken lightly.

It is obvious that we want to avoid negative impact and strive for a positive impact. But doing this, while we are busy with our lives, is not necessarily obvious. That is why it is important to have a "Code of Ethics." This code will serve to regulate our actions and, when followed, will help individuals to avoid certain ethical pitfalls and discern opportunities for positive impact.

When I am faced with an ethical dilemma, I always try to take the time needed to properly consider the situation. This time is important as it allows me to take a step back from the situation and view it without the cloud of emotions that are often come attached. I can then seek advice from different people, and review documents such as a code of ethics.

The superposition of 3rd party advice, publicly available documents, and a careful consideration of the situation all contribute to the formulation of the decision I judge best to respond to the situation.

The case study that was discussed by my small group was that of the recent Volkswagen scandal.

Although I agreed with the majority of considerations that were put on the table, I disagreed with a certain idea that specified that the Volkswagen engineers responsible for coding the software behind the scandal were not to be held accountable as the leadership was ultimately the only responsible party. I, along with others at my table, held that there should be an investigation led to judge the responsibility of the engineers, as it is unlikely they were doing without knowledge of there of their actions.

My group was not able to bring the discussion to an end before the hour was over. However, I think we all agreed that investigations should be led (as is done) in order to determine the responsibilities of each involved individual. In this way, penalties can be afforded to each according to the degree of their responsibility.

I think integrity, honesty, and responsibility relate well to our case study.

The actions taken by the company to fool the emissions tests display a lack of integrity, as the practice of faking a test is inherently lacking in ethics. In this way the company was also lacking in honesty, as they betrayed the regulating institutions and their consumers through their actions. Responsibility also strongly relates to this case as it is crucial to determine each individual's responsibility in the matter in order to determine proper punishment.

I chose these three over fidelity, charity, and self-discipline. Although the company did display a lack in fidelity because they broke the trust of their consumers, I feel charity does not relate well as Volkswagen's actions were not trying to be or appear to be charitable. Also, I did not select self-discipline as the scandal was not brought upon the company because of any one individual's excesses. I can not think of any other virtue that would apply to this situation not mentioned in the "Virtue Ethics" document.