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Ethics Essay

The first two chapters of “Ethics in Information Technology cover the main subjects and ideas surrounding ethics and how they are used in the IT and industry and throughout society. Chapter 1, “An Overview of Ethics,” discusses what ethics are, their importance to our society, their use in the professional world, and the common problems and dilemmas that arise surrounding ethics. Chapter 2, “Ethics for IT Workers and IT Users,” discusses how ethics relate specifically to the Information Technology field as well as the problems that arise ethically in the IT field. Both chapters give insightful looks into why ethics and ethical issues are so important to how we function as a society. This essay will cover the main topics and ideas discussed in these two chapters.

Chapter 1 begins by defining what ethics are and how they integrate with our morals. For the most part, society has decided what is and is not moral. However, there are plenty of prevalent issues that people disagree on the morality of. This same theme is applied to ethics. Ethics in this chapter is defined as “a set of beliefs about right and wrong behavior within a society.” Just like with morality, what constitutes ethical and unethical behavior can vary greatly from person to person. Every person is unique when it comes to what their value system is. Everyone has a certain set of virtues and vices that define their values and their life in general. Because of this, it is near impossible to determine a set of behaviors and values that is considered ethical across the board. Everyone has their own moral standards, and sometimes those standards are challenged in the workplace or elsewhere in society. This determination to decide right from wrong is where many ethical dilemmas stem from. When it comes down to it, morals are on a personal basis while ethics are on a group or organizational basis that a person of that group is expected to adhere to.

When most people think about ethics, they most likely think about it in the business sense. There are countless famous stories about corporations and businesses that have made unethical decisions and have paid the consequences for their actions. Often they will sacrifice their ethics in their efforts to increase the amount of revenue coming into their organization. Many of the stories we know involve the powerful people within those organizations acting unethically, but unethical and damaging behavior can come from people from any position in an organization. This has motivated many corporations to take responsibility to make sure that their organization is always acting ethically. This concept is known as “Corporate Social Responsibility.” Many companies have specific CSR goals that define what they are striving towards as an organization. Working towards these goals can help companies in a number of ways including gaining favor in their community, avoiding bad publicity, and avoiding legal penalties or action.

Organizations are always looking to improve their corporate ethics where they can. Some people hire a corporate ethics officer or corporate compliance officer who maintains the ethical standards in the workplace. They encourage others to act ethically and hold people who act unethically accountable. Often times it is not just an ethics officer, but a board of directors that determine and set the ethical standards an organization is held to. Other employees look to them as examples of how they should act in the workplace, both behaviorally and ethically. The ethical standards of a company are usually incorporated into a code of ethics that is supposed to be followed by all the employees within the organization. Another way organizations make sure their ethical standards are being adhered to are through social audits. Social audits are a way to measure how well a company is meeting their ethical goals. Through a clearly defined code of ethics, social audits, ethics training, and strong managerial ethics throughout the organization, a company can gain a strong reputation for being ethical.

When it comes to making a decision where ethics comes into play, most people have the same decision-making process. First, they define the problem that must be addressed and gather all the pertinent facts. Second, they look for alternative solutions with the help of others that they believe will solve their problem. Next, they will choose a solution to act on and implement that they feel will be the best. Finally, they will implement that decision and as time goes on evaluate the results and see where they should go from there. Through this process, an individual or organization can find strong ethical solutions to the problems that they face.

Chapter 2 gets into ethics in the Information Technology field specifically, and how all the ideas discussed in Chapter 1 apply to that field. The chapter starts with asking the question of whether IT Workers are professionals. They define a profession as “a calling that requires specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation.” Some argue that not all IT workers have a role that fits this definition. This can affect IT workers because of how they are seen in the legal system because legally they may not be professional employees.

IT workers build and maintain professional relationships with many groups of people within the workplace. Because of this, they must hold themselves to ethical standards that come from several places including their employer, the law, and within the relationships they build with people in and out of their organization. IT workers often face temptations to violate policies or laws in their jobs. Their easier ability to commit software piracy is a common problem in the IT industry. Groups like the Business Software Alliance work to combat piracy and stop people from distributing or using pirated software. Another problem that arises is trade secrecy. Often IT workers are heavily involved with projects that are not allowed to be released to people outside of the organization and can be tempted to release secret information for their own gain. These problems generate ethical dilemmas that are unique to the IT industry.

IT workers that work with clients also face unique ethical dilemmas. Problems such as conflicts of interest and fraud are very prevalent in the industry. The idea of monetary gain for an organization or individual makes these unethical behaviors very attractive. If these IT workers lie, break contracts, or fail to provide pertinent information to a client, they can face extensive penalties. IT workers that work with suppliers have their own dilemmas as well. Bribery is a big focus in the industry today. Many companies give gifts in hopes of garnering a partnership with another company. Sometimes these gifts can be used maliciously to sway people’s decisions. This is where it turns into bribery. Bribery has been a big problem for generations, thus there are many different laws and federal acts that make it illegal for people to commit this unethical behavior.

Another common ethical problem is resume inflation. People often either exaggerate their expertise, or they outright lie about the skills that they have. Workers often face penalties or dismissal from the company if it is found that they lied on their resume to acquire their job. IT workers have a duty to be as ethical as possible with the users of their products and the society that they operate within. There are many laws and standards that they must adhere to so that they ensure the users get a sufficient product and society is not harmed in the process.

Many organizations exist that help IT workers connect with each other and enable them to develop ideas and codes of ethics that will help them to thrive in our society. Organizations like the ACM and IEEE-CS help workers network and provide them with material from throughout the industry to keep them up to date and connected with the latest information and ideas. Certifications exist that help IT workers show they are knowledgeable in certain fields and can help them to grow and move up in their industry. Licensing is another idea put out there that could increase the liability and integrity of IT workers. Some people are not as keen on licensing and certification in the IT industry and thus there are not many important licenses or certifications for IT workers to obtain.

Throughout these two chapters, many ethical dilemmas are discussed. Some of these exist throughout the business world while others mainly surround IT workers and the IT industry. Ethics is used to define a way to act with the appropriate behaviors for these workplaces to thrive and operate fairly in our society. It is not hard to see how integral ethics is to the IT field and its workers, and how that will only continue to grow as society pushes forward.