Practical Assessment Week 7

RMIT University - PCP/APD 2019 Semester 2

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# ACTIVITY ONE

* *“In September, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that many VW cars being sold in America had a "defeat device" - or software - in diesel engines that could detect when they were being tested, changing the performance accordingly to improve results. The German car giant has since admitted cheating emissions tests in the US. VW has had a major push to sell diesel cars in the US, backed by a huge marketing campaign trumpeting its cars' low emissions.” (bbc.com)*
* *The EPA said that the engines had computer software that could sense test scenarios by monitoring speed, engine operation, air pressure and even the position of the steering wheel.*

1. **If you worked for VW and your boss asked you to write this "cheat software", what would you do?**

Before beginning to work on the boss’ request to begin building the “cheat software” I would compile a list of the possible limitations and risks that accompany building a software system like this, including and not limited to software failures resulting in unwanted engine activity.

The boss of VW would then be notified of all the ethical implications the proposed software causes as the main function is misleading by design, engineered to trick the EPA into believing the engines are sustainable by fabricating results and detecting pre-testing scenarios. This is unethical from an environmental standpoint and brandishes the business as a dishonest business as a whole.

I would conclude the discussion with the boss by informing him if he does decide to proceed with creating and implementing the “cheat system” it may very well tarnish VW’s reputation and cause irreparable damages to the company image. Another factor to consider is once the software is discovered by the EPA, the administering of a further penance in the form of fines or unwanted tariffs and these could lead to long-lasting implications for the company.

1. **Organise a *meeting agenda* and *discussion points* for the meeting that you will have with your higher authority at VW in order to address your concerns. How will you approach this in your meeting and which negotiation practices will you use to put your opinions across?**

Negotiation practices that should be put to use during this meeting include preparation and compromise. Before meeting with the higher authority it is important to have prepared and researched the issue itself and reasons why the “cheat software” should not be implemented. The meeting may not go as intended and therefore it is necessary to be open to compromising in order to reach and agreement.

**Meeting Agenda**

* Background of the issue
  + EPA discovery of VM cars being sold with defeat device/software
* Ethical issues of cheating in emissions test
  + Deceptive and false advertising misleading potential customers
* Risks and potential effects on VW
  + Risk of system failure
  + Potential effect on brand loyalty and consumers image of the company as a whole
* Summary of why “cheat software” should not be implemented

# ACTIVITY TWO[[1]](#footnote-0)

*Describe the process of ethical deliberation that you would use in trying to resolve the following dilemma.*

*You have been working for the XYZ Computer Corporation as an entry-level software engineer since you graduated from college last May. You have done very well so far; you are respected by the management team, are well liked by your fellow engineers, and have been assigned to a team of engineers that has consistently worked on the most critical and valued projects and contracts that XYZ Corp has secured. XYZ’s most recent contract is for a U.S. defence project involving the missile defence system, and again you have been assigned to the engineering team that will develop the software for this project. However, you are staunchly opposed to the project’s objectives, so you ask to be reassigned. Your supervisor and coworkers, as well as upper management, are disappointed to learn of your strong feelings about this project. You are asked to reconsider your views, and you are promised a bonus and a substantial pay increase if you agree to work on this project during the next year. You also discover from a colleague that refusing to work on this project would greatly diminish your career advancement at XYZ and may even make you vulnerable in the event of future layoffs. To compound matters, you and your spouse are expecting your first child in about three months, and you recently purchased a home.*

**What would you do in this case? Explain the steps that you would take in this situation and justify them with clear reasoning.**

The ethical deliberation process would take ups and downs based on the incoming new information swaying my decision. Each emerging factor would have a certain weight to it, affecting my personal bias or professional stance.

My initial stance would be ‘ready eagerness’ as I would be excited to work with such an elite team. As a simple entry-level software engineer, I would feel a sense of honour working with this particular group of coworkers.

The first and most important point of contention is the knowledge that this project is for a US missile defence system. This would greatly impact my willingness to work on the project as personal bias can affect my attitude, devotion and willingness to conduct myself properly throughout the project. With no other insight, this factor alone would be able to deter from partaking in the project.

The next development of the bonus and pay rise would be a good incentive to make me reconsider my position. However, I believe a monetary gain is not enough to void an individual's moral viewpoint on an issue such as military technology, though this is obviously subject to the monetary amount.

However, this point of persuasion is compounded by the knowledge that a refusal of this project could jeopardize my position at XYZ; either preventing me from advancing in the company or getting fired all together. Since I’m just an entry-level software engineer, it's assumed I am new to the company; and to be relegated to that entry-level position indefinitely is a strong factor in swaying my decision. Furthermore, a layoff would be even more detrimental as it would waste the effort to obtain this position at the company in the first place.

This is further compounded by the fact I have a future child to fund for as well as a house to pay off. Two large investments that would really benefit from the pay rise and bonus; or any funds at all, since refusal of the project could leave me jobless.

At the end of the day it depends on how much my personal moral code is worth to me in comparison to the opposing factors. In my opinion, the deciding factor is the personal life costs: child and house payment. As now my decision no longer just affects me, but my partner and future child.

Entry-level positions or any position in general can be obtained at another company; however, in the current state, I would be in dire need of the salary in the moment. Thus, I would accept the project. In order to relieve my conscience as much as possible, I would ask my supervisor and/or team to be involved with aspects of the project that have the least direct connection to ‘things that break my moral code’. However, this may not be possible due to the structure of the project or the opinions of my superiors.

# ACTIVITY THREE[[2]](#footnote-1)

*In analysing the following scenario,*

1. *What course of action would you take?*
2. *Would you be willing to blow the whistle? Explain your position.*

*For the past six months, you have worked on a project to develop a transportation‐related software program for the city of Agropolis, a project designed to make some much needed improvements to Agropolis’s system of public transportation. You and your team of programmers have worked very hard on this project, but you have encountered difficulties that could not possibly have been anticipated in the original design plan; these difficulties have put your project significantly behind schedule. The city transportation planners are nervous, because they depend on the software from your company to get the new transportation system up and running. And the management at your company is very uncomfortable because it signed a contract to deliver the required software on time. Although the software is not yet foolproof, testing so far reveals that it works about 99% of the time. The few glitches that remain apply only to the transportation system’s backup code, which arguably would be needed in only the most severe emergencies. Residents of the city are also eager to have the new transportation system in place.*

*A decision is made by the management of your company and by the managers of the city transportation system to go ahead and implement the software as it is. They base their decision on the probability that a backup system would not be needed for several months (at which time the remaining bugs should be fixed). A decision was also made by the management groups on both sides not to announce publicly that the software still has a few bugs. You and a few of your coworkers believe that the bugs are more dangerous than the managers are willing to admit. What would you do in this case?*

1. **What course of action would you take?**

With this scenario, the assumption has been made that the transportation system’s backup code directly affects safety of passengers in the case of severe emergencies.

In this case, I would first attempt to explain the dangers of the bugs in the backup code to my manager and discuss potential alternatives related to the timeframe. I would continue this higher up if necessary, in order to ensure that the software is launched with zero glitches. This would include following alternative paths within the organisation and potentially the board of directors, if possible.

If my concerns are not effectively relayed, I would outline the responsibilities both organisations hold to the public and that they would be liable if something happens due to the glitches in the program. This is particularly true because they are both aware of the issues and are not willing to make this knowledge public. This could be argued as putting profits before people.

1. **Would you be willing to blow the whistle? Explain your position.**

If my previous course of actions have not resulted in the halting of the implementation of the program in its current state, I would be willing to blow the whistle as it is in the best interest of the general public’s safety. When considering this I would consult the ACS code and also De George’s Model to assist in my decision making. I would also ensure that I have gotten all my facts about the situation correct so as not to unnecessarily bring harm to myself or to my company. The assumption that the backup system would not be needed in the next few months is irresponsible, as emergencies and when they happen cannot be predicted.

1. Tavani, Herman T.. Ethics and Technology: Controversies, Questions, and Strategies for Ethical Computing, 5th Edition, Wiley, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rmit/detail.action?docID=5106471. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Tavani, Herman T.. Ethics and Technology: Controversies, Questions, and Strategies for Ethical Computing, 5th Edition, Wiley, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rmit/detail.action?docID=5106471. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)