

Module 4: Exercise 4.1 - Systems Theory

Table:

Case 2:	Edward Snowden's release of Top Secret information about National Security Administration security and surveillance practices.							(✓) means unethical
Ethical Quandry	Public	Employer & Client	Product	Judgment	Management	Profession	Colleagues	Self
Were the NSA's security and surveillance practices unethical?	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Was it unethical for Snowden to expose the NSA?		✓			✓		✓	

Response:

I choose to break down Case 2 for this exercise. Case 2 is about Edward Snowden and his activities as a whistleblower on the security and surveillance practices of the National Security Administration (NSA). I will be covering three different ethical quandaries that I feel are significant to this case, as well as, how they affect different individual systems. These individual systems include the public, the employer and client, the product, the individual's judgment, the project's management, the profession, colleagues involved, and oneself.

The first ethical quandary that I covered was whether or not NSA's practices were unethical. With this quandary, the employer would be NSA, the product would be citizens' information, and the client would be NSA and other government organizations that used this information. This is clearly unethical from the public point of view as shown by their reaction to the information leaked by Edward Snowden. The ethical view is a little hard to pinpoint for the rest of the systems as it is hard to put myself in the shoes of NSA during the dark times after 9/11, but I will still try to break this quandary down nonetheless. I would say that from an employer & client point of view they were ethically in the right as they believed that tracking this information could benefit society. The product may have been unethical as the tracked information may not be of the best quality and on top of that, they may have been biased on who to track, i.e. deciding to focus on people of Islamic decent rather than your average white American. Assuming that the NSA was doing this on their own accord rather than being forced

by a higher official, then I would say that their judgment was ethically in line. The management of the product was definitely unethical as no one except for the government and their employees knew about what was happening. From a professional point of view, the NSA was also unethical as they weren't advancing their integrity or reputation as a government organization at all by tracking their citizens and hiding this practice. I believe that the NSA was also unethical towards its colleagues or employees as they forced them to start tracking their fellow citizens for the "greater good" of the US, when they may not have been comfortable in doing so. As stated, the NSA believed that they themselves were ethically in the right due to the current climate of the US and the idea that tracking their citizens could help protect everyone.

The second ethical quandary that I covered was if Edward Snowden informing the public of NSA's security practices was unethical. Since this was done with the public's interest in mind, it was ethically correct towards the public. Since this act was against the NSA's order and through classified information, it was definitely unethical from the client's and employer's point of view. The product was ethical because Snowden informed the public of the NSA's practices as well as released proof to back up his claims. His judgment was ethical since it followed his own moral compass instead of his employer, NSA. I feel as though his management of the product was unethical since he release the information in an improper way of just publicly releasing classified documents instead of carefully selecting what information was relevant, though I can't blame him too much since he was a wanted criminal. I believe his professionalism was ethical as well since he did what he believed any government employee should do and was transparent with his job. He definitely wasn't ethical towards his colleagues since what he did could have endangered them and cost them their lives if the citizens learn who they were or if the NSA found out they helped Snowden. Lastly, Snowden was ethically correct towards himself since he applied what he believed to be ethical towards his job.

In conclusion, both parties believed what they were doing was correct. NSA's moral compass is slightly different because of how big of an organization it is and the responsibilities it holds. The NSA chose to prioritize the safety of US citizens instead of their privacy, which wasn't a very popular idea given the public backlash afterward. Snowden on the other hand prioritized the public's interests and his own ethics which went against the NSA's policies and made him a wanted criminal. It's hard to say who was in the right as it has been several years since this occurred and both privacy and security policies have changed drastically, but both parties believed that what they were doing was for the betterment of the US.