COSC244 Ethics assignment Jeremy Haakma, 363947

1. What are your duties to your employer?

My duties to my employer include applying my skills in the interest of the employer, as well as continuing to maintain my competence in the field (IITP Code of Practice, Section 2.2). Section 2.3 of the Code of practice also states I must adhere to all regulations, which, among other things, ensures my employers do not get involved in legal trouble.

The IITP Code of Ethics encourages IT professionals to apply their skills in the interest of their employers *“without compromising any other of these Tenets”* (IITP Code of Ethics, Section 1: Skills). However it would not be surprising for an employer to expect their employees to act in the best interests of the company *at all times*. In the example of the security company, this deceptive review practice is one that is presumably condoned and supported by the company management; An employee who followed the IITP Code of Practice (Section 2.1, Conflict of Interest), by disclosing the conflict between the dishonest review practice and the interests of the public, might very well be risking their own position in the company by doing so. This does not change the ethics of the situation however, and my duties towards my employer should never extend beyond what is ethically appropriate.

2. What are your duties to their client?

As an employee in the IT industry, my duties to the client would include respecting their interests. This includes considering whether an assignment is of value to the client (IITP Code of Practice, Section 2.8). In the case of the security review, it would be important for the client to understand the value and scope of the review process, notably that the second review only rechecks the bugs found in the initial review.

As with my employers, I would be required to act in the best interests of my client, so long as doing so did not violate any of the other ethical Tenets (Section 1: Skills). Naturally, trying to act in the interests of both my client and my employer could lead to conflicts of interest (IITP Code of Ethics, Section 5.3). I would have a duty to my client to disclose any of these conflicts, and must ultimately use my own moral judgment when deciding which course to take if a resolution is impossible. For example, if a client asked for access to sensitive company information, that might be in the “best interest" of the client, but would be obviously unethical, and the duties to the company would come first. On the other hand, if my employer asked that I lie to my client about the effectiveness of the services I provided (for instance, saying a clean bill of health in a security review means the software is 100% free of bugs), it would be unethical to do so, even if it was in the best interests of the company.

If I were to go along with the security review, it would be important to inform the client of the consequences of treating that second cursory review as a "clean bill of health", or implying that it meant the reviewed software was "unhackable" or completely free of bugs. This falls under the *Informed Consent* Tenet of Section 1 of the IITP Code of Ethics. Doing so would suffice to fulfill the duties to the client in this instance, as it would be their responsibility to decide whether going through with the practice would be to their benefit. This does not necessarily mean that disclosing these consequences would absolve me of *all my* ethical duties, however. As the next section will discuss, allowing the client to go through with the review process may violate my duties to the public.

3. What are your duties to the general public?

Unlike my duties to my employer and client, there may not be a direct link between my actions and the interests of the general public, meaning the consequences can be less certain. This means I must be particularly vigilant in my ethical considerations in regard to the public. In the case of the security review company, it would be easy to disregard the negative effects of my actions: my client is happy, my employer is happy, and if said client chooses to misrepresent the work I did as some sort of guarantee that his code is "bug free", am I really to blame? Well, yes, partially, at least according to the IITP. Acting ethically in the IT field requires that one act in good faith and integrity (IITP Code of Ethics, Section 1), and knowingly acting in a way that goes against the good of society would be a breach of those ethics. In the case of the two-step review, the practice is clearly designed to deceive, and instill a false sense of security (literally) beyond the level it has really attained. To knowingly participate in such deception would be a violation of my duties to the public.

4. Can you continue to work at this job, and if so, what if anything should you do about the situation?

Assuming my role in the company included working on the deceitful review process, I would probably be unable to continue working for this security review company. Theoretically I ought to try and confront management about the practice (IITP Code of Practice, Section 2.1), but realistically this would be a waste of time, and a quick way to antagonise my employer. The one area in which I disagree with the IITP Code of Ethics is the fact that it fails to address an employee's duties to themselves. If there is no way to continue ethically, an employee may be faced with either distancing themselves from the situation in a strategic manner (resigning on good terms), or going about it “by the books” (confront management, make a fuss, and resign on bad terms). While the Code of Practice suggests “disclosing conflicts of interests”, it also does not rule out simply resigning. Personal gain/loss does not change the *ethics* of a situation, but it does affect *which* ethical resolution one should make. Furthermore, even if I were somehow to convince this company to change it's practice, it would arguably be more ethical to distance myself as much as possible from a company willing to engage in such deceit in the first place.

If my role in the company did not involve personally working on deceptive practices, my response would be less clear cut. On the one hand, I should make an effort to distance myself from unethical practices, and working for a company that engages in such practices could be argued as an indirect contribution to the problem. On the other hand, acting ethically in the real world requires being pragmatic; avoiding all interactions with any company that engaged in ethically questionable behaviour is basically impossible, and, as mentioned above, there is nothing wrong with considering the consequences to your own situation when deciding how to resolve ethical dilemmas, so long as the decision is itself ethical. If I found out about this practice, and I was not personally involved in it's execution, I would most likely remain at the company (depending on my own circumstances), and do what I could to promote more ethical practices in the company (as per Section 2.9 of the IITP Code of Practice). However I would not do so at the risk of my own employment: I don't believe acting ethically requires you to actively tackle the ethical dilemmas of others, if doing so puts you at risk (again, this would be theoretically ideal, but realistically impossible).