

## **Exercise 4.1 Systems Theory and Ethics Summary**

*Here we seek to find answers to the question: what are the ethical implications of a retailer selling a customer's personal information to others for profit? In addition, which systems (technical and sociotechnical) are involved and how are they being used in these ethical implications?*

As pointed out in the corresponding excel sheet, this scenario raises many important ethical quandaries. First, a company selling customer information is not acting in the best interest of the public, as it caters to the interests of outside companies and third parties, which is often in conflict with the interests of the customer as a consumer. Furthermore, it would not uphold the "Client/Employer" ethical principle by breaking the customer's confidentiality if said data were not anonymized. Another important ethical consideration is consent: were customers informed that their information was subject to collection and sale? If not, it would serve as another unethical decision on the part of the retailer. Also, the selling of customer data may be at conflict with the integrity and reputation of the profession as it sets a dangerous precedent that does not protect a customer's right to privacy. In addition, security is another concern: what happens if customers' data falls into the wrong hands or is misused by a third party? All of these provide examples of potential ethical quandaries which arise from the selling of customer information -- in order to gain a better understanding, let's take a look at the systems involved in this process.

Here, I've included 6 main systems which I believe would be involved in this ethical scenario: Customer Management, Product Management, Service Management, and at the heart of the ethical discussion, Data Collection, Data Exchange, and Data Analytics. A Customer Management System, which helps manage the interactions and interrelationships between customers and the company, would play a key role as it involves collecting and tracking customer information as it relates to the products and services provided by the company. Similarly, Product and Service Management Systems may play a role, as data being collected from customers can be used to influence or improve the products and services being provided -- an act which may or may not be inherently unethical depending on the specific context. Now, at the heart of the ethical dilemma, are three integral systems: Data Collection, providing a company with the ability to collect customer data (which may be separate from that needed for Customer Management), Data Exchange, in which customer data is transferred to third parties, and Data Analytics, which companies and third parties can use to process and analyze customer data to gain some competitive advantage. These systems are highly involved in these ethical quandaries, which are highly contingent on specifically what information is being collected from customers and how it is being used by both the company, and the outside parties it is being sold to.