Hi everyone!

On this activity, I decided to pick Case Study #4 to create a step-by-step using the Ethical Decision-Making Model and referencing the ACS Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

These are the ethical issues I found in the Case:

- IP (Intellectual Property) Violation: Sharmila copied code from a commercial software package without permission.
- Breach of Confidentiality: Using a co-worker's source code without approval.
- Plagiarism / Lack of Attribution: No disclosure in documentation or reporting.
- Professional Misconduct: Misrepresenting the originality of her work to her employer.

The application of the Ethical Decision-Making Model

Step 1: Recognise the Ethical Problem

- Sharmila knowingly incorporated copyrighted and confidential code without consent or attribution, breaching professional and legal standards.

Step 2: Gather Facts

- The project was under time pressure.
- She had access to 2 code sources: a co-worker's project (I'm assuming it's company property) and a commercial software package (assuming that under copyright/license restrictions).
- She did not disclose this usage.

Step 3: Identify Stakeholders and Impact

- Sharmila herself (career, reputation).
- Employer (potential lawsuits, reputation damage).
- Original software owners (loss of control over IP).
- Clients or end-users (risk if product is pulled or modified due to infringement).

Step 4: Consider alternatives

- Seek manager's understanding of the complexity and request an extension.
- Ask for help from colleagues or technical support teams.
- Use open-source alternatives with proper licensing.
- Adapt algorithms from publicly available, properly licensed resources.

Step 5: Evaluating each one of the options

- Copying proprietary code: It was quick but unethical and illegal.

- Requesting deadline extension is ethical, transparent, and preserves IP rights.
- Open-source code is ethical if license is followed.
- Team collaboration is ethical as it promotes knowledge sharing.

Step 6: Decide and Justify

- The ethical choice would have been not to copy proprietary code and instead seek assistance, extensions, or licensed alternatives.

Relevant Conduct Clauses

From the ACS Code of Ethics:

- 1.2 Honesty – Be truthful about work and capabilities.
- 1.3 Competence – Only undertake work within your competence and seek help where necessary.
- 1.4 Professional Development – Continue to develop knowledge rather than misappropriate others' work.
- 2.1 Primacy of Public Interest – Avoid actions that could harm the public, including legal breaches.
- 2.5 Professionalism – Respect the work and intellectual property of others.

From the ACS Professional Conduct:

- Clause 4.3.2 – Respect and protect intellectual property.
- Clause 4.3.4 – Avoid plagiarism and give proper credit.
- Clause 4.4.1 – Advise clients/employers of potential legal implications.

My take on the case and recommendation is that Sharmila should:

1. Disclose the incorporation of external code to her manager immediately, explaining the circumstances.
2. Remove and replace the infringing code with original or licensed alternatives.
3. Learn proper intellectual property handling and secure code reuse policies.
4. In future, escalate complexity issues early and request additional time or resources.
5. Document all sources and obtain written permission before using third-party code.