COM6655 Professional Issues Autumn 2021

Tutorial for week 3 (11th October): Another ethical dilemma

Scenario

Mitron is a large computer hardware and software vendor. Anthony Frasier is a software-support analyst for Mitron's Bristol office. Anthony is on the phone with customers much of the time. He reports the customer's program bugs to Engineering, and he gives his customers software patches or workarounds directly over the phone.

When Anthony hears about difficult software problems, he takes his expertise to the customer personally. Until last year, his on-site support and occasional user training were provided as a part of the customers' maintenance contracts. That practice became so popular that it was too expensive for Mitron. They had to change the policy of free support and training, so they unbundled the support services from the maintenance contract. Now Mitron charges its customers separately for on-site support services.

Mitron suffered during the past recession. Management's response to the crunch was to freeze all salaries for 18 months. Twelve months have passed, and Mitron is still suffering the consequences. Some people have been laid off, and Anthony suspects that his days are numbered. However, he knows he is still valuable to Mitron; his supervisor told him that he'd be the first to get a raise, if that were possible.

One of Mitron's largest customers and one of Anthony's most important clients is Bristol Council. Over the years, he has established a close relationship with many key Council employees. The Council has several sites where employees need a lot of technical help and training; the users prefer to contract with Mitron rather than to develop the expertise from within. Anthony has been working closely with Mary Coulter in the Council Information Systems Office. They know each other well and have developed a level of mutual trust. Yesterday, Mary called Anthony.

"Anthony, I have a proposition for you to think about."

"OK"

"The Council needs someone to help out with their new system. It's the new PAX 3355 system your people installed this summer, and they need support and training. Want to do it?"

"Sure. Send up the paperwork and I'll get started".

"Wait, you don't understand. I want *you* to do this, not Mitron. If we get you through the company, it'll take months of paperwork. And we have to pay the Mitron overhead fees."

"I don't know, Mary. You're asking me to do something that my company pays me for. Isn't that a conflict of interest?"

"Well, that depends. Your company's present policy on that really should change, don't you think? Like when they unbundled service from maintenance. Anyhow, we want you rather than some other consultant we don't know, even if they're cheaper. You know, success at this site in Bristol means a lot of future business to Mitron. My feeling is that they'd go along with this if we explained it to your management."

"Why don't you? What's the rush? Why don't you present your case to our management? Maybe they can hurry up the process, get you an answer in a couple of weeks."

"Anthony, you don't understand. We can't wait that long. And the sooner the system is up and running, the better it will be for the entire city. Don't forget that one of the big reasons we got this system was to reduce the delay of payment on unemployment compensation. We won't ask you for any time that would

interfere with your normal work schedule. You name the hours, show up when you can, and we know you'll do the job. To make it worth your while, we'll pay you 20 percent above the usual consulting fee, and give you a £5,000 bonus when you're through."

Anthony said nothing. He is pleased that his reputation is so good. He is overwhelmed at the generosity of the offer. He considers it the chance to start up a decent nest egg in case he's laid off. But he wonders at the consequences if word gets out …

Adapted from Kallmam & Grillo, Ethical Decision Making and Information Technology, McGraw Hill.

In your breakout groups
- One member of your breakout group should be given the role of rapporteur – they should take notes and be prepared to speak on behalf of the group at the end of the tutorial.

Discussion points
- What are the key facts in this scenario?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What are the ethical issues here?
- What are the legal issues here?
- What would you do in this situation?