

Applying Different Ethical Frameworks to a Dilemma

The choice to build code for Java Du Jour's free Wi-Fi system presents an ethical conundrum because different ethical frameworks have different views on consent and privacy. When taken as a whole, these ethical theories offer compelling justifications for declining this employment offer, arguing that the long-term costs of privacy violations exceed any immediate profits.

This essay will examine many ethical viewpoints while evaluating the decision's repercussions, moral guidelines, and commendable actions. Comparing the results and guiding principles reveals that the writing of the disputed code violates both individual privacy rights and the company's ethical standing, making it impossible to justify.

Act utilitarianism states that an action is right if it maximizes overall happiness or well-being. Regarding the morality of an action, it considers the consequences and how it affects others. In this case, writing the code that would scan Wi-Fi traffic for email addresses would create greater happiness for some individuals by giving them free coffee, and at the same time would provide increased business for Java Du Jour. This practice, however, does violate the privacy of typical people who are not customers of JDJ and have never consented to providing their data.

Customers being upset over the invasion of privacy or a loss of confidence in the JDJ business could slightly outweigh the benefits of having a free coffee. The wider social ramifications would often diminish overall happiness, such as creating a precedent for immoral data collection practices. The act-utilitarian argument would probably suggest declining the position because the cost of the privacy invasion is probably more than the benefit of the free coffee coupons. But since this is a subjective dispute, one may argue for either side.

Rule utilitarianism deals with whether the rules behind an action would produce the greatest good if followed universally. It simply judges an action's rightness or wrongness by whether it follows a justified moral rule. In the case where everyone followed a rule allowing businesses to acquire email addresses through unconsented monitoring, this would imply privacy violation by default, a loss of trust in businesses, and significant long-term harm for society.

Following this rule, one could easily imagine that such a world would formally violate privacy and, in the long run, not create more happiness; therefore, such an action probably will be rejected by a rule-utilitarian analysis as it violates a universal moral standing and would result in a tremendous amount of harm and less well-being.

In terms of deontological ethics, more specifically according to the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant, one can infer that actions have to be done in accordance with those principles which can be willed universally. The first formulation of the categorical imperative is to examine whether the action that is being considered could be willed as a universal law. In this case, it probably wouldn't be widely accepted as a universal moral law because it would encroach on personal choices and privacy rights of individuals.

The second formulation of the categorical imperative states that persons are to be treated as ends unto themselves, not merely as a means to an end. This is considered as the formula of humanity, where persons are valued as rational beings. Gathering email addresses without consent treats individuals as a means to the company's growth, in other words marketing and increasing sales which is a violation of their autonomy. Deontology would then say you should not take the job because the action violates both formulations of the categorical imperative.

The second formulation is easier to apply here because one is faced directly with unethical treatment of persons, treating them as mere data points. This is slightly different as the first formulation requires more abstract reasoning concerning universal laws.

Social contract theory itself is based on the proposition that individuals in society implicitly agree to sets of rules and behaviors in return for certain benefits, such as security, order, and mutual respect. People using public Wi-Fi do have expectations of privacy; the gathering of personal data without consent would likely violate the implicit social contract held between businesses and individuals that there exists mutual respect and trust. Without the feeling of consent, it would truly harm the individual perception of the business from the individual standpoint.

Social contract theory would be against taking the job because the JDJ business breaks the social contract by not taking explicit consent for the collection of data on anyone and using their emails for their own personal use. It is harmful to the social fabric, and thus trust amongst consumers and businesses is a reason great enough to outweigh any benefit that could possibly be discovered from these patterns.

Virtue ethics takes into consideration what a virtuous person would do; that is, someone who intends to develop good character traits, including honesty, fairness, and respect. In this case, it can be simply regard for others' privacy. A virtuous coder would thus not take on the opportunity to write software that violates others' privacy without their consent, as this action would be unfair and disrespectful. Defining it as a virtue, an employee of this business would clearly not be identified with integrity or justice by subjugating to this practice.

Therefore, the ethics of virtue would recommend avoiding the job. A person dedicated to the virtues of respect for privacy and justice would not support unethical practices of data harvesting as an employee of JDJ.

When taken as a whole, these points of view suggest that accepting the position would be a mistake. Long-term utilitarian consequences of the legislation and laws demonstrate that the long-term negative effects of privacy breach outweigh any short-term benefits. The foundation of deontological ethics and social contract theory is respect for individuals and upholding the trust necessary for the social contract. Virtue ethics would emphasize the human virtues of integrity and justness. All of them point in the direction of unsafe and negative impacts from following through with this offer. It would provide long-term adverse effects to the business and harm the individual's integrity to create such a pattern within the company's policy.

The ethical path is to decline the job and, where it is safe to do so explain to JDJ why it is unethical and can suggest alternatives that do not breach consumer privacy and result in their marketing objectives.

Now let's consider a few strengths and weaknesses to the various ethical frameworks in the context of this scenario:

- **Strength of Deontology:** The major strength of deontology is the clarity of principle involved; for example, the categorical imperative gives a direct criterion for right or wrong with no weighing of complicated consequences. In this case, it provides a strong denial of the job offer in violation of individual autonomy.
- **Weakness of Act-Utilitarianism:** One of the weaknesses of act-utilitarianism is that it deals with the prediction and weighing of consequences, which may be indeterminate and immeasurable. For example, it is difficult to quantify the long-

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term harm done by invasions of privacy, and measure this against the immediate advantage of sending coupon offers; thus, the application of the theory is less clear-cut.