

ITEC810 ETHICS ASSIGNMENT

Situation:

You work for a large software company. You are involved in preparing a tender for a project, which is essential for the company's survival: if you don't win the contract, you will have to fire two employees who report to you.

The software you would be developing is intended to track consumer buying habits in order to predict where advertising will be most successful.

Over a coffee, a friend suggests to you that one of the client's key market objectives is to determine the most effective way of reaching school children in the 16-18 years age-range with cigarette advertising.

What I would do:

As a team leader, I am responsible for protecting my team member's job security. As an employee, I am responsible to do what is in the company's best interest. In this case, it is winning the contract. Once I confirm that this project can affect the future of two of my team members, the first thing I would do is to call a team meeting. In the team meeting, I will explain the situation to my team members informing them the importance of the project and how it can affect their future in the company. I will also let them know that the nature of this project involves reaching school children in the 16-18 years age-range with cigarette advertising. I will let the team know what powers I have if we do not win the contract. I will still try my best to fight against having to fire two employees, but I must also let the team know that this is a direct-order from higher management-

Assumptions:

- Team consists of more than two members
- Decision to fire two employees is from higher management
- There are a number of members who is opposed to the idea of the project
- Good understanding and relationship with team members

Aim:

The aim of the team meeting is to motivate the team to perform at their best for this project. For this approach to work, I must understand my team members well. I need to know that being honest with my team members will encourage them to work harder, and it will not have the opposite effect. If I know my team members are not going to be motivated by the above approach, then I would come up with other methods to get them more involved with the project. The overall aim is to win this contract by being honest with the team.

Justification:

By involving the team with what is happening with the company, it will help them understand the problem we are facing. This builds a trust relationship between my team and myself. Professionals will always perform at their best no matter what difficult situation they are facing. Everyone in society is responsible for carrying out certain functionality and no single person can solve everyone's problem. A gun designer is going to design the most powerful gun and a missile designer is going to design the most destructive missile. It is the responsibility of the user who determines how to use the gun or the missile. We are aware that ethically cigarette companies should not aim cigarette advertising at teenagers, but our responsibility, our job and our role in this situation is to produce a good project tender for our software and eventually develop a good piece of software which helps cigarette advertising.

ACM Code of Ethics:

The ACM Code of Ethics argues for both sides of the argument. It is impractical to strictly follow the ACM Code of Ethics when making a business decision. Below, is a breakdown of how the ACM Code of Ethics

support and oppose the decision I have made in the cigarette advertising project. After looking at both sides of the argument, we will explain why we have decided the need to win the contract.

Against:

Imperative 1.1 – “*Contribute to society and human well-being*” states that the products of computer professionals will be used in socially responsible ways, which meets social needs, and avoid harmful effects to health and welfare. We are aware that promoting teenage smoking is unethical because teenagers cannot think maturely enough to pay attention to health issues and are easily affected by peer pressure.

Imperative 3.1 – “*Articulate social responsibilities of members of an organizational unit and encourage full acceptance of those responsibilities*” specifies that leaders must participate in meeting social responsibilities. This implies that I should not be pushing for the team to win the contract for this project, because we are aware that this project would be considered unethical in the general society.

Imperative 3.4 – “*Ensure that users and those who will be affected by a system have their needs clearly articulated during the assessment and design of requirements*”. If we win the contract, it is highly unlikely that the health issues of teenagers will be included in the assessment and design of requirements.

For:

Imperative 1.3 – “*Be honest and trustworthy*”. This supports my decision on being open with the team. When acting as a layer between higher management and a development team, a good team leader needs to be as transparent as possible. That is the reason for letting them know the whole situation and building a trustworthy relationship.

Imperative 2.1 – “*Strive to achieve the highest quality, effectiveness and dignity in both the process and products of professional work*”. As mentioned previously, professionals must perform at their highest quality no matter what the circumstances are. It is important for the reputation of the company that we win every contract tender we attempt, and we satisfy each customer’s needs.

Imperative 2.6 – “*Honor contracts, agreements, and assigned responsibilities*”. When you first join the company, you sign the employment contract, which states that you must carry out your work in favor of the company. Honoring the employment contract means winning the contract and developing a piece of software meeting the customer’s requirement, which in this scenario is determining the most effective way to reach teenagers with cigarette advertising.

The imperatives against my decision for winning the project tender (imperative 1.1, 3.1 and 3.4) deals with a very wide social issue – teenage smoking. As we have discussed previously, each individual has his or her own responsibility in society. We are a software company and our responsibility is to develop good software to satisfy our clients. Solving teenage smoking is not part of our role. Teachers, parents and the government are the parties responsible for resolving issues involved with teenage smoking. Solving that is beyond the capability of our software company.

Minor Improvements on ACM Code of Ethics:

The ACM Code of Ethics contains some ambiguities where it could be improved. In imperative 1.2 – “*Avoid harm to others*”, “Harm” is defined as means of injury or negative consequence relating to information system. It should be expanded to a more general area where it concerns the general society. In this case, “Harm” can be defined to include harm to human health because our software will have an indirect effect on teenage smoking.

Issues relating to the environment are becoming an increasingly important part of society. Although it is not directly related to our case, there should be an imperative or guideline in the ACM Code of Ethics to specify that any new information technology design should consider the environmental impact.