

Introduction

Sourour is a coder. He is hired by a company for his first major job as a developer, and he makes a quiz for them. The problem is that one of the websites that he made for the company may have been considered unethical. This is because the website existed to promote a medication with a quiz under the premise that the quiz would provide appropriate solutions to problems that a user has in the form of a recommended medication. The quiz would only promote the medication that the company owned unless the user had an allergy or was already taking a different medication. In this paper, I argue that Sourour's actions in creating the code for the company was unethical due to the dishonest nature of the quiz and for Sourour not choosing to breach confidentiality when creating the website. Sourour could have done things differently by either not making the quiz, or choosing to be more transparent with the information on the quiz because he would have cause less harm had he acted differently.

part I

A.)

The ACM, IEEE, and NSPE code of Ethics all present the ethical foundations on which an engineer in one of those organizations should practice their profession. All three codes of ethics have commonalities, mainly being that engineers seek to uphold the safety and health of the public, do no harm, and act with integrity and honesty.

ACM section 1.2, NSPE section 2 Rules of practice 1A, and IEEE rule 8 are all rules that say that engineers should avoid taking actions that could injure other people. The ACM code of ethics goes into depth and defines harm as something that causes injury or negative consequences, and that an engineer that causes harm is responsible for that harm, and therefore

should take the proper steps to rectify the harm caused. It also says that harm can be caused by misrepresenting system features.

An engineer in one of these organizations must also act with integrity and honesty, and each of the codes have their own definition of what acting with integrity and honesty is. IEEE has broad definitions of honesty and integrity. IEEE says that one should avoid conflicts of interest, make realistic claims based on available data, reject bribery, and don't discriminate. ACM says that honesty is not making deliberately false or deceptive claims, providing full disclosure of system limitations and also providing full disclosure of conflict of interest and qualifications. NSPE has very specific rules about honesty and integrity. According to the NSPE, an honest engineer with integrity will act as faithful agents or trustees towards employers or clients, avoid deceptive acts, make public statements in an objective and truthful manner, and will not reveal pertinent information without prior consent from the client.

B.)

Looking through the Engineering ethics codes, Stourour can be seen as acting unethically. This is because each codebook puts a strong emphasis on being honest to the public, and taking responsibility for any harm that one may cause. Stourour could have caused harm by creating a quiz that deliberately chose one medication. This is a deceptive and dishonest act because people taking the quiz will be under the impression that the quiz actually wants to help them find the right medication, but the quiz does not exist to provide suitable medication, it exists to promote a product. It omits important information and therefore does not provide public statements in an objective and truthful manner. Not only is this quiz deceptive, it also causes potential harm due to the side effect of depression that the medication could potentially give to people taking the

medication. Another reason why the Code of Ethics would consider Stourour's actions immoral is because he does not take any action to fix the harm he may have caused.

C.)

I argue that from a utilitarian perspective, Stourour is unethical. From the codes of ethics provided, Stourour is doing harm in making this website. Utilitarianism is about adding as much pleasure and as little displeasure to the world by any means necessary. When Stourour made the website, he added more displeasure than pleasure to the world. By making his quiz, he made the client happy. But he also caused harm according to the engineering codes of ethics. By causing harm according to the code of ethics, he is actively causing more displeasure than he is adding pleasure.

II

A.)

Armstrong discusses various professions and the nature of the confidentiality that they must maintain. Confidentiality has four pillars that should all be considered equal until there is an overriding circumstance. Two of these pillars are Individual autonomy over personal information and respect for relationships among human beings and for intimacy. The pillars are a good foundation for confidentiality, but they are not absolute. An infringement of one of these pillars could result in an infringement of confidentiality. For an infringement of one of these pillars to be justified, Armstrong has some criteria that the infringement must achieve. One of these criteria is that the infringement must have a moral objective that is realistically achievable.

The choice to uphold some value over confidentiality can be classified into two kinds of duties: positive and negative. Positive duties seek to add something good to the world, while negative duties don't seek to add good to the world but they also don't seek to add negativity to the world. Armstrong describes some criteria for deciding whether a positive or negative duty should be carried out. Two of those criteria are relentlessness and magnitude of consequences. Relentlessness is how dischargeable a duty is, and if you were not to do something, would the outcome be favorable in terms of the ethics of a profession? At times, positive duties can be considered relentless ones, and a professional may be obligated to do the positive duty if the choice is relentless enough. The magnitude of consequences is how much of an effect doing a negative or positive duty will have after the duty is done.

B.)

Analyzing the Sourour case through Armstrong's arguments of the nature of confidentiality as well as Armstrong's criteria for decision making, Stourour did not breach confidentiality, but the circumstances surrounding the development of his quiz could have warranted a breach in confidentiality. An example of an action that Sourour could have done that would be a justified infringement of confidentiality is to be transparent with the people that took the quiz. The quiz could have let people know that the quiz was funded by that medication, it could have shown them the potential side effects of the medication, and it could have shown the quiz takers that there is only one answer unless you are taking other medications or are allergic to the medication. If Stourour did this, some of the four pillars of confidentiality may be compromised. It takes away autonomy of information from Sourour's client, and shows less respect for Sourour's relationship with his client, which are two of the pillars of confidentiality. But these infringements may be justified as it has a realistically achievable moral goal. It could be argued

that the company is not morally correct in not openly providing information of the side effects of the medicine, and by making this information readily available in his quiz, Sourour's infringement of confidentiality would have a moral goal of informing people about the potential dangers of the medicine. Using Armstrong's criteria for judging whether or not a positive or negative duty should be done, we can see that these actions are significantly relentless and have a large magnitude of consequences. The significant relentlessness comes from the fact that if Sourour does a negative duty by doing nothing, then people will suffer negative side effects of the medication. The magnitude of consequences is also severe because the people who are potentially affected could potentially have life changing side effects from the medicine in the form of depression. So Sourour should do the positive duty of adding honesty and transparency to the website.

C.)

What was morally wrong about writing the code for the pharmaceutical quiz was that by choosing to uphold a form of confidentiality with the client, Sourour didn't consider the other criteria for upholding confidentiality. By doing so, he potentially caused more displeasure to the world by allowing people to become persuaded to buy a medicine without fully understanding the side effects. Something he could have done differently is to be completely transparent about the medicine even though it may mean he breaches confidentiality with his client. Sourour would be morally justified in doing so through a utilitarian perspective. This is because by providing information about the side effects Sourour would be choosing to not add potential displeasure to the world in the form of adverse side effects.

Summary

In conclusion, Sourour could have taken different actions that would have led to a more ethical result by either being more transparent in the information he gave, or by not making the quiz at all. Sourour was unethical because of the dishonest nature of the quiz, as well as his choice to not breach confidentiality. But one problem with this argument is that the engineering codes of ethics also value a trustworthy relationship between the employee and employer. If Sourour did anything different, he would not be honoring the wishes of his employer, and he would be betraying the trust of his employer. This could be considered a conflict of interest, which the codes of ethics also discourage. This case is a good example of how it may be hard to balance the responsibility of working for someone while still acting with integrity. Acting with integrity is hard when your responsibility as a professional requires you to put your job on the line.