Case Analysis: Professional Ethics

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In this Case Analysis, I will argue that writing the code for the pharmaceutical quiz was morally problematic because it contributed to deceptive marketing tactics that could harm vulnerable individuals, such as the tragic outcome of a young girl. Bill Sourour, the coder involved, should have taken a different approach in this situation by considering the broader ethical implications of his work and the impact it could have on individuals' health and well-being. In this Case Analysis, I will argue that Confucianism reveals the moral problematic nature of Sourour's involvement in coding the quiz due to its adverse impact on vulnerable individuals, and he should have taken a different course of action by refusing to contribute to the project, aligning with his moral obligations within his professional role.

The central concept of professional ethics, particularly in the context of coding and software development, revolves around the responsibility to contribute positively to society while upholding fundamental ethical principles. According to the Codes of Ethics for computing professionals, one must strive to protect human rights, respect diversity, minimize negative consequences, avoid harm to others, be honest and trustworthy, and prioritize excellence and quality in professional work. Professional integrity includes accepting and providing appropriate peer review to ensure the highest standards of ethical conduct and quality.

In the case of Sourour's involvement in coding a pharmaceutical quiz that unethically promoted a specific drug regardless of quiz answers, several ethical lapses are apparent. Firstly, the quiz design directly contradicted the principle of contributing to society and human well-being. By disregarding individuals' best interests and potentially exposing vulnerable individuals to harmful drugs, the code failed to protect fundamental human rights and minimized negative consequences.

Secondly, Sourour's response to his project manager's concerns about the quiz depicts a breach of honesty and transparency. Instead of acknowledging the ethical dilemma and engaging in critical reflection, Sourour defended the flawed design, prioritizing the pharmaceutical company's interests over professional integrity and consumer well-being.

From a Confucian perspective, which emphasizes the importance of staying on a morally upright path, Sourour's actions can be deemed morally questionable. Confucianism stresses the significance of proper role fulfillment and maintaining right relationships with others.

In this context, Sourour's role as a coder should have required a deep consideration of the potential consequences of his work on society, aligning with the Confucian emphasis on relational responsibilities. Confucianism would have encouraged Sourour to prioritize the broader societal implications of his coding work, recognizing the interconnectedness of roles and responsibilities within a community. Sourour could have taken a stand against the deceptive marketing tactics inherent in the quiz design, emphasizing the importance of ethical coding practices that prioritize human welfare and societal benefit.

The moral imperfections of Sourour's involvement in coding the pharmaceutical quiz lies in the disregard for fundamental ethical principles and societal well-being. By aligning his actions with professional ethics and Confucian values, Sourour could have chosen a different path—one that prioritized honesty, transparency, and the protection of human rights over narrow corporate interests.

At the heart of Armstrong's framework is the fundamental concept that professions, including engineering and coding, are organized around a shared expertise with a service promise to benefit society. This service promise highlights the ethical obligation of professionals to prioritize the public interest above individual or corporate concerns. Within this framework,

professionals must carefully uphold the public good and make sure their actions help society in a positive way.

Engineers, in particular, have struggled with the ethical dilemma of confidentiality versus public safety. They have recognized that protecting public health and safety outweighs any duty of confidentiality they may have. This recognition stems from the catastrophic nature of engineering disasters and the potential magnitude of harm that can result from failures to disclose critical information. Engineers are actively developing structures to encourage necessary disclosures internally while also protecting their members from potential repercussions.

Applying these concepts to the case of Sourour and the pharmaceutical quiz, it becomes clear that Sourour had a professional obligation to prioritize the public interest over the interests of the pharmaceutical company. Despite the pressure to design the quiz in a way that promoted the company's drug, he should have recognized the potential harm to public health and safety inherent in promoting a potentially harmful drug to vulnerable individuals, such as teenage girls.

Confucianism provides further insight into the ethical aspects of Sourour's actions. According to Confucian principles, individuals are guided by a moral path, or dao, that emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's roles within society. Properly fulfilling these roles involves nurturing the right relationships with others and considering the broader societal impact of one's actions. In this context, Sourour's role as a coder should have involved a deep consideration of the potential consequences of his work on public health and safety, aligning with the Confucian emphasis on relational responsibilities.

Based on this assessment and analysis, the right course of action for Sourour would have been to prioritize the public interest and refuse to participate in designing a quiz that promoted a potentially harmful drug. By aligning his actions with both Armstrong's framework and

Confucian values, he could have upheld his professional duty to benefit society and protect public health, even in the face of pressure from his employer. Ultimately, ethical conduct and societal well-being should take precedence over individual or corporate interests in professional decision-making.

In conclusion, both the Code of Ethics and Armstrong's framework highlight the ethical obligations of professionals to prioritize the public interest and societal well-being. Professionals, including engineers and coders, are entrusted with specialized knowledge and have a service promise to benefit society, not harm it.

The case of Bill Sourour and the pharmaceutical quiz illustrates the complex interchange between professional ethics, societal obligations, and individual responsibilities. By prioritizing the public interest and societal well-being over corporate interests, professionals can uphold ethical standards and contribute to a more just and harmonious society. This case highlights the need for ongoing reflection and ethical consideration in professional practice, as well as the importance of integrating diverse ethical perspectives to inform decision-making.