

Case Analysis on Professional Ethics

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In “The Code I’m Still Ashamed of,” Bill Sourour describes how, as a young developer in 2000, he was assigned to create a quiz for a pharmaceutical website. The quiz openly suggested a particular medication for teenage girls irrespective of the answers they provided unless they had an allergy or were actively using it. This was an ethically wrong approach, and it resulted in the aggravation of mental disorders and the suicide of a young girl (Sourour, 2016). According to the consequentialist account, Sourour’s conduct was immoral because it yielded negative consequences. Sourour had other courses of action open to him; for instance, he could report the ethical issues to the management and the highest authorities, consult with other bodies overseeing ethics, or decide not to code the misleading quiz. In this case analysis, consequentialism proves that the code was ethically questionable because it led to adverse effects and that Sourour should have acted otherwise.

Ethical Analysis Using Consequentialism

The "Do No Harm" approach is one of the most basic principles of the professional code of ethics, especially in information systems development, following the ACM Code of Ethics statement. This principle requires software professionals to refrain from creating software that harms users or the entire public. They must be able to look at the risks inherent in such software and act accordingly to prevent harm. In the instance of Bill Sourour, the developing actions violated this principle. By coding a quiz that led to a patently biased recommendation of a particular drug irrespective of the viewers' answers, he was involved in a deceptive act that presented several hazards to the viewers, especially the teenage girls who constituted his target market. Sourour's decision to code the quiz, as outlined in the client's requirements, denoted that he assisted in distributing false and potentially fatal information (Sourour, 2016). This is because

the quiz was designed to market the pharmaceutical company's drug as the best remedy for the users' conditions regardless of their health status. Such practice was unethical and potentially damaging to users' well-being given that it presented a drug called Prozac with no serious side effects like severe depression and suicidal thoughts. Such distortion is a blatant violation of trust and an ethical standard set by the "Do No Harm" principle.

Consequentialists operate under the notion that the consequences of an action are equivalent to its morality. The effects brought by the coded quiz were all negative. It displayed questions that let users think the promoted drug was the best solution to whatever ail them, which likely worsened mental conditions and led to severe depression and at least one suicide. Consequentialism focuses on the fact that even if the intention of the action is good, if the outcome is evil, then that act is evil (Viggiano, 2020). In this case, although Sourour's decision was professional based on the client's request, his failure to consider the harm involved in meeting these demands and the fact that he performed the tasks makes the decision essentially wrong from the consequentialist point of view (Haines, n.d.). This shows that Sourour had several options that could have reduced or even eliminated the adverse outcomes associated with the situation. Firstly, he should have asked whether it was ethical to design the quiz in such a manner as it was. Knowing that it was deceptive, he could have declined to code it as required, ensuring that people did not fall victim to such false information. Refusal would have been another ethical approach that would have protected the user from harm for not fulfilling the expectations of a particular client. Besides, Sourour could have addressed his grievances, including taking the issues to the firm's top management or seeking consultation from the ethical regulatory agencies or the finance industry. In doing so, he could have triggered a

reconsideration of the moral considerations of the project and perhaps caused a rethink to bring the safety of the users first.

Ethical Analysis Using Armstrong's Concepts

Central Concepts from Armstrong

Armstrong provided an ethical business strategy highlighting the principles of ethical responsibilities and accountabilities for the public good of society. He states that software developers should follow the professions' code, act righteously, refrain from wrong, and promote good. Armstrong argues that professionals cannot limit themselves to legal obligations but should stand for the ethical stance (Varkey, 2020). An essential requirement of this approach is to bear responsibility for users and the public concerning any negative outcome due to professional activities. This framework confirms that ethical work is a non-ethical misrepresentation and a commitment to doing the right thing and the public's longevity.

Application to the Case

Armstrong's concept applies to Sourour's case because it outlines the rules and guidelines for how the quiz should be constructed and regulated. Sourour's decision to code the quiz, despite its aim to mislead the audience and lead them toward the desired drug, no matter the details entered, was against Armstrong's principles of professional and ethical practice and benefiting the public (Varkey, 2020). In this manner, the quiz cheated users because they were not provided adequate information regarding the side effects of the drug, and all that the quiz aimed at was to make a profit for the specific firm. This was a criminal and reckless approach, even more so when the team knew that it was testing the drug on teenage girls. So, according to Armstrong's ethical theory, Sourour went against the ethical norms of protection and doing good.

That he practiced compliance with these fictitious standards was a terrible ethical action, at the very least, a sign of professional recklessness.

Assessing Sourour's Actions Through Consequentialism

Consequentialist Perspective

Consequentialism, a meta-ethical approach, categorizes actions depending on the results they yield. In this scheme, the morality of an action depends on its outcome since the goal is to obtain the best possible outcomes and avoid the worst. In Sourour's case, the coded quiz came with highly negative consequences, such as worsening mental illnesses and at least one death by suicide. These negative impacts explain the lack of a positive balance of effects. From the same ethics, it is wrong to do something that brings harm, regardless of motivation (Sourour, 2016). Thus, the action taken by Sourour to follow those fake coding requirements is unethical because he created a negative impact with no positive side effects. Sourour should have concentrated more on the welfare of the users rather than working for the client from the perspective of the theory of consequentialism. The ought implies not contributing to these adverse effects, thus further solidifying the wrongful behavior of Sourour. It ought to have sought to prevent harm and promote the welfare of the users, as per consequences ethics and Armstrong.

Alternative Actions and Their Justifications

The first thing he should have done is to question the ethicality of designing the quiz in such a way, and he should have declined to code it just as instructed. He could have saved many people from being fed this wrong information and using it as a baseline knowledge. Also, Sourour could have devised a less biomedical approach for the quiz and included the risks of the different treatments. This would have ensured that there is openness and that the safety of the users is cared for. Besides, Sourour could have taken his ethical worries up to the next stratum of

the organization's leadership or sought advice from ethics regulatory authorities in the firm or the sector (Sourour, 2016). Thus, this user-centered approach would have meant that Sourour had discharged his professional duty of acting in the public interest and ensuring no harm was done. These actions would have prevented the outcomes that were seen and formulated a norm for ethical practice in practice. Choosing user safety and transparency instead of meeting the client's expectations would have produced a better and more ethical outcome, emphasizing Arseniyevna's commitment to ethical principles and the general public's welfare.

Conclusion

As the consequentialism moral theory can be seen in this Case Analysis, the code was wrong in placing profit before welfare. There are several different things that Sourour could have done, which include but are not limited to reporting the matter to a superior or choosing not to code the fraudulent quiz. Instead of writing the deceitful code, Sourour should have taken another action, including resignation, to avoid harming innocent users. Although it is comprehensible that due to job pressure and orients from the client, Sourour felt compelled to act as he did, he should always remember that the law protects clients and, therefore, his actions should not harm them. Software developers, in particular, should be sensitive to the ethical choices that arise in software development as technology becomes a growing sociopolitical force. Following ethical principles and considering the impact of applications on users' health would allow developers to minimize hazardous outcomes and promote the development of ethical applications that improve the overall quality of humanity.

References

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