Professional Ethics Case Analysis using Ethics of Care Moral Reasoning

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Introduction

In the article "The Code I'm Still Ashamed Of," Bill Sourour shares a memorable ethical issue he faced at the beginning of his professional experience as a software engineer. When hired to develop a quiz for a pharmaceutical company's website, Sourour was upset when he learned that the quiz was programmed to recommend the company's product no matter the answers given (Sourour, 2016). This was a plan to manipulate teenage girls into believing that they required the drug, which was associated with risky side effects like depression and suicidal thoughts. Although the quiz was legal, the ethical consequences were severe. Through the lens of the ethics of care, Sourour was ethically wrong to do what he did and he should have acted differently for the sake of users and for ethical reasons. This case analysis will illustrate the importance of ethical awareness within a professional setting through the application of different sets of codes of ethics and an ethics of care moral reasoning.

Analysis Using the Codes of Ethics

Central Concepts from the Code of Ethics

The Codes of Ethics of the IEEE, ACM, and NSPE can provide some guidance in evaluating Sourour's actions. Together, these codes establish requirements based on two core principles: honesty and non-maleficence. They also emphasize the importance of defining the public interest to assess the ethical nature of Sourour's actions. For example, the IEEE Code of Ethics states that engineers should be honest in their work and should not initiate, develop, implement, or promote actions that endanger or harm other persons or the public, or their property, reputation, or employment (IEEE, 2023). It also reaffirms the fundamental responsibility of engineers in regard to public safety, health, and welfare in all their activities. Similarly, the ACM Code of Ethics requires computing professionals to be quite useful to society

and humanity and mitigate the social costs of computing, including harm to health, safety, and privacy, besides being ethical and honest in their practice (Association for Computing Machinery, 2018). These principles are also adopted in the NSPE Code of Ethics, which requires engineers to protect public health and welfare, not act irresponsibly and with less competency than they promised (NSPE Executive Committee, 2007). All these codes suggest that there are negative effects on society, emphasizing the professional responsibility of professionals.

Application to the Case

Applying the above-mentioned ethical principles in Sourour's case shows numerous violations of them. Since the quiz contained a false suggestion of a certain drug, he breached the first element of all three ethics codes, the principles of honesty, do-no-harm, and public welfare. The quiz presented the users with a feeling that they required the drug, which could be fatal to them. It is important to note that the IEEE never presented values such as public welfare, the ACM never mentioned harm, and the NSPE disregarded competence and honesty. While Sourour should have demanded adherence to professional and ethical standards, he complied with the client's unethical directives, causing the practice of a process that was potentially dangerous to individuals in society.

Ethical Assessment

The ethics of care can be used as an extension of this reasoning, as it focuses on the moral obligation to care for others and ensure their safety. From this point of view, it is possible to conclude that Sourour's actions are rather questionable since he did not think about the consequences of his work for the teenage girls who became victims of the quiz. The ethics of care suggests that in addition to adherence to principles, one should also think of the practical ramifications of an action on people. Sourour should have informed his employer of the

unethical practice and declined to develop the quiz in a way that deceives users. This would have shown a concern for the lives of the users and the discharge of his ethical duties as a professional. In not doing so, he not only endangered the users but also eroded the basic human values of care and accountability that form the concept of ethics of care.

Furthermore, the ethics of care also indicates that the activities of professionals should be based on the recognition of people's interdependence and the effects of actions on others. The lack of refusal to challenge the unethical demands of the client also shows that Sourour lacks the relational and emotional components of ethical decision-making. If he had thought about the psychological and or emotional damage that was likely to be inflicted on the users of the quiz, especially teenagers and teenage girls in this case, he might have acted differently, knowing it was immoral to engage in such an act. Ethics of care points out that ethical practice entails going the extra mile in all professional dealings with the goal of establishing trust and respect. It is important for professionals to integrate self-reflection into their daily practice in order to ensure that clients are treated with dignity and respect, improving ethical practices in the workplace.

Mary Beth Armstrong Analysis

Central concepts from Armstrong

Mary Beth Armstrong's short story "Confidentiality: A Comparison Across the Professions of Medicine, Engineering, and Accounting" presents a wealth of information regarding the professional code of ethics, particularly those that pertain to issues of confidentiality and professional responsibility. According to Armstrong, confidentiality is an aspect of professionalism and is the foundation of trust between people. Confidentiality is the protection of the identity of the person who shares information with professionals, ensuring professionalism in interpersonal relationships. Armstrong also notes that such violations not only

destroys trust on a personal level but also undermines the profession and its reputation. This is particularly the case in fields such as medicine, engineering, and accounting since the loss of information can pose severe impacts (Armstrong, 1994). Additionally, confidentiality is not the act of being silent; it is the service and ethics of protecting and respecting the right to privacy of other people.

Application to the case

By applying Armstrong's concepts, several ethical dilemmas can be discovered in Sourour's case. Sourour impersonating a quiz that overnight replicated the same message of recommending a particular drug was a blatant infringement of the user's privacy and confidence. The second listed professional responsibility by Armstrong is to do what is right for clients rather than for themselves or for the company, where client's welfare and lives are valued. However, Sourour served the interest of the company profits at the cost of the users, which he deemed a betrayal of his professional oath. This deception not only led the users to make wrong decisions that could possibly be fatal to their lives but also brought down the level of confidence that the users had in the professionalism of the service. Armstrong's framework also supports this view because, according to professional ethics, one is supposed to protect and enhance the welfare of clients rather than exploit them (Armstrong, 1994). Therefore, by violating this principle, Sourour made an unethical decision, which raised questions about professionalism and ethical standards, two of the most important values in public sector work.

Ethical Assessment

Ethics of care also challenges Sourour's actions by emphasizing relational obligations and the moral duty to attend to those affected. This ethical perspective suggests that practitioners should approach their work with kindness, patience, and a strong concern for the welfare of their

clients. Through the lens of ethics of care, Sourour was wrong in deciding to code a quiz that would mislead the users. He failed in his ethical responsibility to the users. Their confidence and well-being were jeopardized by the deceptive quiz. Ethics of care suggests Sourour should have declined from developing a tool that is intended to deceive and harm its users while promoting integrity and honesty. Had he employed such an approach, his professional activities would have reflected the key pillars of care, empathy, and responsibility. Applying Armstrong's concepts of confidentiality and professional responsibility to the ethics of care highlights that Sourour's actions were ethically unjustifiable, emphasizing the importance of professionalism in safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable individuals.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis using the IEEE, ACM, and NSPE Codes of Ethics, Armstrong's concepts, and the ethics of care moral reasoning, it's evident that Sourour was morally wrong in writing the code for the pharmaceutical quiz in the way that he did. With the deceptive quiz, Sourour compromised the users' well-being, which goes against the principles of honesty, doing no harm, and serving the greater good. Sourour should have protested ethical issues to his employer and declined to take part in deceiving the users. This case serves as a reminder to all professionals of the importance of ethical reasoning in their practice, specifically when it comes to the well-being of the public. Adhering to these ethical standards fosters trust in professionals and promotes a fairer, more compassionate society. Looking at Sourour's case through a critical and analytical lens highlights the importance of potential consequences of professional decisions and why ethical scrutiny should be observed in all professional practices.

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