

Matthew McGill

CPR E 394

Faculty Member: Dr. Julie Rursch

Nov 17, 2016

## Ethics

Ethics are important. Every day around the world, millions of corporations, non-profit organizations, healthcare centers, educational institutions, etc. face ethical decisions that define their moral conduct and underlying philosophy. There is no denying that ethics are extremely important to study and adopt in today's world of innovation and business-related decisions. As one can clearly see, having a 'code of ethics' to follow and learn from is imperative for company success. Analyzing ethical decisions can often prove to be rather difficult, as each situation is unique and all perspectives/viewpoints must be taken into consideration. Having a set of pre-defined values and moral beliefs for any organization, in this case the larger engineering community, serves a great purpose. As tough, ethical decisions are being made, companies can consult the code of ethics to help them in their decision making process. Will the code of ethics always offer a clear black and white solution to every problem? Absolutely not, but the code of ethics will embody the beliefs of the larger community, and often will influence and affect how a final decision is reached.

When faced with an ethical situation, one of the biggest factors that greatly influences my decision making is people and my relationship with others. Who will be affected, and in what way will my final decision impact them? I strive to reach a solution that will benefit as many people as possible. This influences how/where I put my time and energy. I also stand firm to the

moral values I was raised with, and so the “mirror test” is another factor that influences a majority of decisions I make. Would I be ok if I decided to go down a particular path? Could I continue to wake up each day after a certain situation is addressed? These personal, self reflection questions have proved to be very beneficial to me. I believe that in striving to become a better person, it’s important to ask reflection questions; that’s the best way to learn!

The case study my group discussed was over the Volkswagen emissions scandal that made headlines earlier this year. Volkswagen was accused of cheating various emissions tests, which they eventually pleaded guilty to in late 2015. The engines of millions of Volkswagen vehicles worldwide were found to be equipped with a software program that caused the motor and several other components of the car to run “below normal power and performance” during test scenarios, but then return to normal on the actual road, producing up to 40 times more pollutants than what is currently allowed in the United States. This is clearly a huge problem, and Volkswagen has since been faced with lawsuits and further investigations. In general, my group reached a common consensus; this behavior was not ok, and Volkswagen absolutely deserves to be in the tough situation that they are currently going through. While we did feel that Volkswagen was put under a lot of pressure, financially and politically, they should have taken the proper steps to produce lower-emission vehicles (even at the risk of falling profit margins, more advanced manufacturing, etc.), instead of cheating their way through the system, jumping through loophole after loophole. Not only is the integrity of the company at stake, but also the environment. I believe that we should protect and sustain the world that we live in, and taking measures towards a healthier environment is essential.

In reflecting back upon this assignment and group discussion, integrity, fidelity, and responsibility are the three virtues that relate the most to our case study. Integrity because the Volkswagen executives should have made the proper judgment in evaluating this initial decision. Instead, we see the desire for power and the lust for money. Fidelity implies faithfulness, and this couldn't be more true to the situation. Volkswagen has the obligation to be fair and faithful towards their customers, as well as the environment. No loyalty was shown here. Finally, responsibility is absolutely applicable to this scandal. Many many years ago, Volkswagen should have made the personal and moral decision to act for the good and benefit of others. As I have clearly pointed out before, this did not happen. The other three virtues not mentioned still have value, they just don't apply towards this particular scenario as well as the three mentioned above.

In conclusion, ethics are important. Having a set of moral standards (i.e. a 'Code of Ethics') to live by and govern one's decision making process helps make the engineering community a trustworthy and valued place. While not every decision made is perfect, learning from other's mistakes and taking the time to reflect on the ethical decisions we make every day leads us to become better, virtuous individuals. Together, one decision at a time, we can make the world a better place.