

Collaborative Discussion 1 – Research Methods and Professional Practice – Initial Post – Zihaad Khan

ACM Case: Automated Active Response Weaponry

ACM Ethics (2018) provides a case study of an international company called Q Industries responsible for the manufacture of automated response weaponry on autonomous vehicles. These vehicles were used in military and law enforcement engagements. The initial design of the vehicles involved the use of tear gas and acoustic weapons to combat physical attacks by protesters. Due to multiple governmental requirements, Q Industries extended the design of the vehicles to include lethal weaponry involving target shooting and explosives. Engineers at Q Industries protested against the use lethal weapons and was subsequently sued for breaching their employment contract (ACM Ethics, 2018).

The case study highlights the importance of ethical principles as defined by the ACM (ACM, 2018) and the BCS (BCS, 2022). Looking at the aspect around the engineers approach only, as computing professionals engineers are ethically bound to act in the best interest of the public governed by legislation (principle 1.1 of ACM, 2018). Their actions are justified according to principle 1.2 (Avoid Harm) and principle 2.7 (Foster public awareness) of the ACM (2018). Furthermore, this aligns with the BCS code of conduct (BSC, 2022) which states that computing professionals “have due regard for public health, privacy, security and wellbeing of others and the environment”. However, one must also be cognisance of the fact that employees are bound by the terms and conditions in an employment contract.

One can argue that this would supersede their confidentiality employment agreement. However, an employment agreement is a legally binding document in accordance with the law of that specific country. Marcu et al. (2020) argues that while ethics promote and bring about good they are not laws. On the other hand, the BCS (2022) code of conduct also mentions that information should not be withheld “unless lawfully bound by a duty of confidentiality not to disclose such information”, in this case engineers were legally bounded by an employment agreement.

References

ACM Ethics. (2018) ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Available from: <https://ethics.acm.org/> [Accessed 29 January 2023].

BCS. (2022) The Chartered Institute for IT CODE OF CONDUCT FOR BCS MEMBERS. Available from: <https://www.bcs.org/media/2211/bcs-code-of-conduct.pdf> [Accessed 29 January 2023].

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