



## Objectives

Aim 1: Given a specific case study, you will be applying the proper ethical problem-solving techniques

Aim 2: Given a specific case study, you will be able to assess the alternative solutions based on the ethical theories

## INTRODUCTION

In this module, we will continue to learn **Problem-Solving Techniques**. You will be applying the proper ethical problem-solving techniques to the two case studies. You are free to offer alternative ethical theories to find a solution to the situations below, particularly during the lecture. Therefore, please read the cases and the definitions below regarding Bribe and Whistleblowing.

### CASE 1: An Application of Problem-Solving Methods: Bribery/Acceptance of Gifts

One of the many gray areas of engineering ethics is the acceptance of gifts from vendors or offering gifts to customers to secure business. The difficulty here comes because of the potential for gifts to become bribes or to be perceived as bribes. Frequently, engineers find themselves in the position of either dealing with vendors who wish to sell them products for incorporation into the engineer's work or acting as vendors themselves and working on sales to other engineers to companies.

In many cases, there is a fine line between bribery and a simple gift. Sometimes, the distinction has to do with the value of the gift. Always, it has to do with the intent of the gift. It is important to ensure that no matter how innocent the gift may be, the appearance of impropriety is avoided.

---

*Bribe: is something, such as money or a favor, offered or given to someone in a position of trust in order to induce him to act dishonestly.*

---



During a sales visit, a sales representative offers you a coffee mug with his company's name and logo on it. The value of the mug is five dollars. Can you accept this item?

Does the answer to this question change if this item is a \$350 crystal bowl with the name of the company engraved on it? How about if there is no engraving on it?

Your meeting with a sales representative is running into the lunch hour. She invites you to go out for lunch. You go to a fast-food restaurant and pay for your lunch. Is this practice acceptable?

Does the answer to this question change if you go to an expensive French restaurant? If she pays for lunch?

A sales representative from whom you often purchase asks if you would like to play tennis with him this weekend at one of the local municipal courts. Should you go?

Is the answer to this question different if the match is at an exclusive local club to which he belongs? What if he pays the club's guest fee for you?

A company sales representative would like you to attend a one-day sales seminar in Konya. Your company will pay for your trip. Should you go?

How about if the meeting is in Belek? What if the sales representative's company is going to pay for you to go? What if your family is invited as well?

## CASE 2: Whistleblowing

**Whistleblowing** is the act by an employee of informing the **public or higher management** of **unethical or illegal behavior** by an employer or supervisor. In this module, we will examine the ethical aspects of whistle-blowing and discuss when it is appropriate and when it isn't appropriate.

A distinction is often made between internal and external whistle-blowing. Internal whistle-blowing occurs when an employee goes over the head of an immediate supervisor to report a problem to a higher level of management. Or, all levels of management are bypassed, and the employee goes directly to the president of the company or the board of directors. However, it is done, the whistle-blowing is kept within the company or organization. External whistle-blowing occurs when the employee goes outside the company and reports wrongdoing to newspapers or law-enforcement authorities. Either type of whistle-blowing is likely to be **perceived** as disloyalty. However, keeping it within the company is often seen as less serious than going outside of the company.

There is also a distinction between **acknowledged and anonymous** whistleblowing. Anonymous whistle-blowing occurs when the employee who is blowing the whistle refuses to divulge his name when making accusations. These accusations might take the form of anonymous memos to upper management or of anonymous phone calls to the police. The



employee might also talk to the news media but refuse to let her name be used as the source of the allegations of wrongdoing. Acknowledged whistle-blowing, on the other hand, occurs when the employee puts his name behind the accusations and is willing to withstand the scrutiny brought on by his accusations.

During the course of your professional life, you might come across a few cases of wrongdoing. How do you know when you should blow the whistle? We will start to answer this question by first looking at when you may blow the whistle and then looking at when you should blow the whistle. Whistle-blowing should only be attempted if the following four conditions are met [Harris, Pritchard, and Rabins, 2000]:

- 1. Need.** There must be a clear and important harm that can be avoided by blowing the whistle. In deciding whether to go public, the employee needs to have a sense of proportion. You don't need to blow the whistle about everything, just the important things. Of course, if there is a pattern of many small things that are going on, this can add up to a major and important matter requiring that the whistle be blown.
- 2. Proximity.** The whistle-blower must be in a very clear position to report on the problem. Hearsay is not adequate. Firsthand knowledge is essential to making an effective case about wrongdoing. This point also implies that the whistleblower must have enough expertise in the area to make a realistic assessment of the situation. This condition stems from the clauses in several codes of ethics which mandate that an engineer not undertake work in areas outside her expertise. This principle applies equally well to making assessments about whether wrongdoing is taking place.
- 3. Capability.** The whistle-blower must have a reasonable chance of success in stopping the harmful activity. You are not obligated to risk your career and the financial security of your family if you can't see the case through to completion or you don't feel that you have access to the proper channels to ensure that the situation is resolved.
- 4. Last resort.** Whistle-blowing should be attempted only if there is no one else more capable or more proximate to blow the whistle and if you feel that all other lines of action within the context of the organization have been explored and shut off.

These four conditions tell us when whistle-blowing is morally acceptable. But when is an engineer morally obligated to blow the whistle? There may be situations in which you are aware of wrongdoing and the four conditions discussed above have been met. In this case, the whistle may be blown if you feel that the matter is sufficiently important. You are only obligated to blow the whistle when there is great imminent danger of harm to someone if the activity continues and the four conditions have been met. A great deal of introspection and reflection is required before whistle-blowing is undertaken.

It is important for the whistle-blower to understand his motives before undertaking this step. It is acceptable to blow the whistle to protect the public interest, but not to exact revenge upon fellow employees, supervisors, or your company. Nor is it acceptable to blow the whistle in the hopes of future gains through book contracts and speaking tours.



Engineer A is employed as the City Engineer / Director of Public Works for a medium-sized city and is the only licensed professional engineer in a position of responsibility in the city government. The city has several large food processing plants that discharge very large amounts of vegetable wastes into the city's sanitary sewer (wastewater) system during the canning season. Part of the canning season coincides with the rainy season. Engineer A has the responsibility for the wastewater treatment plant and is directly responsible for the City Administrator C. Technician B answers to Engineer A.

During the course of employment, Engineer A notifies Administrator C of the inadequate capacity of the wastewater treatment plant to handle the potential overflow during the rainy season and offers possible solutions. Engineer A has also discussed the problem privately with certain members of the city council without the permission of City Administrator C. City Administrator C has told Engineer A that "we will face the problem when it comes." City Administrator C orders Engineer A to discuss the problems only with him and warns Engineer A that his job is in danger if Engineer A disobeys.

Engineer A again privately brings the problem up to other city officials. City Administrator C removes Engineer A from the responsibility of the entire sanitary system and the chain of command by a letter instructing Technician B that he is to take responsible charge of the wastewater system and report directly to City Administrator C. Technician B asks for clarification and is again instructed via memo by City Administrator C that he, Technician B, is completely responsible and is to report any interference by a third party to City Administrator C. Engineer A receives a copy of the memo. In addition, Engineer A is placed on probation and ordered not to discuss this matter further and that if he does, he will be terminated.

Engineer A continues in his capacity as City Engineer/Director of Public Works, assumes no responsibility for the disposal plant and beds, but continues to advise Technician B without the knowledge of City Administrator C.

That winter during the canning season, particularly heavy storms occurs in the city. It becomes obvious to those involved that if wastewater from the ponds containing the domestic waste is not released to the local river, the ponds will overflow the levees and dump all waste into the river. Under state law, this condition is required to be reported to the state water pollution control authority, the agency responsible for monitoring and overseeing water quality in state streams and rivers.

Did Engineer A fulfill his ethical obligation by informing City Administrator C and certain members of the city council of her concerns?

## REFERENCES

- Fleddermann, C. B. (1999). Engineering ethics (Vol. 4). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rabins, M.J., Harris, E., Pritchard, M.S., and Lowery, L.L., "Engineering Ethics," <http://ethics.tamu.edu>
- Michael S. Pritchard, Michael J. Rabins, Ray James, Elaine Englehardt. No preview available - 2013. Engineering Ethics: Concepts and Cases.