

Ethics in Engineering

CPRE 394

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The “Code of Ethics” are incredibly important for engineers to follow. Engineers work with issues that can have devastating impact on the public. It can erode trust with engineering, create a divide between general public, and create lasting health or environmental damages.

An important distinction is between morality and legality. There are many cases that a company and its engineers are completely correct within a legal standpoint but not an ethical. One example of this difference is in the case of Amazon’s Ring product, a security camera that acts as a doorbell, giving video footage to police without owners consent. This could be seen as a break of honesty. Although the rights to do so were in the privacy policy, the lack of clarity left users concerned about what other rights they believed they had could be circumvented.

The problem with many engineering ethical questions is that the engineers job is directly related with optimizing risk. A bridge could be nearly indestructible but would not be feasible to build in any capacity. Ethics can be viewed as another of these variables. When Ford found a design flaw in the Ford Pinto rather than ethically recalling the cars it was deemed cheaper to pay off victims. This calous number crunching leaves no place for humanity or lives lost. This is why a level of charity and responsibility is needed, especially in cases of potential death or injury. This shows how important weighing ethics into engineering.

Ethics are deeply personal and although values can be the same, view of what these values mean can be radically different. I personally believe that open information and clarity of information is paramount to what the virtue of honesty means. Informing users and clients of exactly how information will be used. This amount of clarity may be seen as unnecessary or detrimental for many reasons and is the reason many hold different opinions on what it means to be honest.