

The Right Data Teaching Notes

What Are the Relevant Facts?

1. Arnie Armstrong has reduced the amount of data on reports sent to department managers.
2. Willy McClean secretly buys data from someone on the Computer Services staff to supplement the variance reports he receives.
3. Kathy Cleary knows of Willy's practice of buying data, thinks it is unethical, but does not know what to do about it.

What Are the Ethical Issues?

1. Should Willy buy data for his use in managing his department?
2. Should Kathy tell Mr. Armstrong (or anyone else) what Willy is doing?
3. Should Kathy use the data source in Computer Services?

Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?

- [Arnie] Armstrong
- Willy McClean
- Kathy Cleary
- The data seller in Computer Services
- Other department managers and supervisors
- Stockholders of the company

What Are the Possible Alternatives?

Kathy could:

1. Tell Mr. Armstrong of the situation when she meets with him tomorrow.
2. Ask Willy to stop his data purchases.
3. Turn Willy in to Mr. Armstrong anonymously.
4. Buy information for herself if and when she needs it.
5. Do nothing.

What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?

1. Ask questions based on a "utilitarian" perspective (costs and benefits). For example:
2. Which alternative would provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number?

3. How would costs be measured? How would value be determined for (a) using the data vs. (b) not using the data?

4. Does this situation have costs and benefits beyond the company itself?

- Ask questions based on a "rights" perspective. For example:

1. What does each stakeholder have the right to expect?

2. Which alternative would each stakeholder find least desirable?

3. Are there any obvious conflicting stakeholder rights?

4. Does Mr. Armstrong have a right to expect his employees to follow his order?

- Ask questions based on a "justice" perspective (benefits and burdens). For example:

1. Is it fair for Willy to have access to data not given to other department managers and supervisors?

2. Should Kathy be deprived of data that would allow her to make better decisions, i.e., do her job effectively?

3. Should anyone in Computer Services enrich himself or herself because of the company's failure to provide adequate resources (data)?

What Are the Practical Constraints?

1. Can the practice of buying information be curtailed or stopped?

2. Can the company afford to provide the data Mr. Armstrong has decided will not be sent to manufacturing managers and supervisors?

3. Does the lack of information impede the function of managers under Mr. Armstrong?

What Actions Should Be Taken?

1. What actions should Kathy take?

2. Which alternative should Kathy choose? Why should she choose it?

3. Which ethical theories (utilitarian, rights, justice) make the most sense in this situation?