

## The Nonanonymous Survey Teaching Notes

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2. Sharon could “forget” to develop the coding system.
3. Sharon could inform the community organization of the plan and try to convince them to demand that Randy eliminate the coding system.
4. She could try to convince Randy to ask people openly for their names on the survey and to explain that the information will be shared with a retailer in order to better serve their fitness needs.
5. Sharon could quit her job.

*What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?*

1. The most important ethical analysis is for the first alternative. Is the intended behavior in fact unethical?

- Utilitarian Perspective:

1. Randy Larson, Donald Quellin, and the community organization all will gain from the proposed plan. Larson will cover at least some of his costs, Quellin will gain information, and the community organization will gain free data. This survey can be done for free in part because of the selling of some of the information obtained in the survey. One could argue that the respondents will also gain. By getting feedback from their customers, the community organization can improve services offered to their customers. The sporting goods store will also better meet its customers’ needs. Through the direct mail advertising campaign, potential customers will receive information about the new store. Finally, by doing a good job on the survey, Sharon Roberts will improve her standing in her boss’s eyes.
2. However, she will also feel a pang of doubt about her behavior. Respondents are harmed to the extent that they want information about them to be anonymous.
3. The utilitarian analysis shows that the principle “the greatest good for the greatest number” is not violated.

- Deontological Perspective:

1. *Categorical Imperative.* What would happen if all market researchers coded surveys so they could identify individual respondents? If this practice was so common, consumers would eventually find out. They would know the surveys were not anonymous and would generally stop answering them. The system would break down.
  2. *Rights.* The strongest case against the proposed behavior is rights. Consumers are losing their right to privacy, a liberty right. Consumers are also losing two of the four consumer rights. They are losing their right to be informed, because they are not informed that the surveys are not anonymous. They are also not informed that information will be sold to a third party. As a result, they are also losing the right to choose. They cannot choose whether they want information about them sold to a third party.
  3. The community organization has also lost its right to be informed, both about the lack of anonymity of respondents and the selling of data to a third party.
  4. *Justice.* The justice principle is not violated; all respondents are treated equally. All will be identified and will have information about them sold to a third party.
- Both the categorical imperative and rights principles indicates that behavior is unethical.
  - Because there are conflicting conclusions when applying utilitarianism and deontological principles, further discussion must be engaged in to try to decide which principle makes a stronger argument. (See further discussion below.)
2. In terms of other alternatives which deal with sabotage, whistleblowing, or quitting, the results would definitely include Sharon Roberts’ career being harmed. If she “forgets” to do the coding or if she informs the community organization and convinces them to protest the proposed plan, she is likely to be fired. If she quits, she is also without a

job. If she “forgets” to code this job or quits her job, there is no doubt that the surreptitious coding will continue to occur. This would therefore not change the basic situation.

3. If Sharon informs the community organization of the proposed plan, the plan will no longer violate the community organization’s right to know how the survey is being done.
4. If Sharon is able to convince Randy to ask openly for the respondent’s name and explain how the information will be used, she will no longer violate the consumer’s right to know and to choose. The community organization will also know how the information will be used, since they will see the survey. The utilitarian analysis will change, however. There may be a lower response rate and/or a biased sample. This could result in less useful information for both the community organization and Donald Quellin (and ultimately a lower cost for Quellin and fewer costs covered in Market Info).

*What Are the Practical Constraints?*

1. Sharon is only an assistant project manager. She cannot make the final decision.
2. Sharon is very enthusiastic about her new position; she knows that her career advancement depends on gaining broader experience.

*What Actions Should Be Taken?*

1. Which ethical principles--utilitarian, rights, or the categorical imperative--offer the best support for determining whether the behavior is ethical?
2. There will be conflicting opinions. Some would argue that because everyone benefits to a certain degree, the proposed plan is ethical. I would argue that the benefits accrued to the major stakeholder, the respondents, do NOT outweigh the violation of their right to be informed and their right to choose. There are two reasons for this. First, the benefits which they would receive are not major in terms of adding to their quality of life. More importantly, however, these benefits are not guaranteed. Perhaps the community organization will not make significant changes based on the results of the survey; perhaps Donald Quellin will decide not to open the retail store. However, the violations of the respondents’ rights are assured.
3. What actions should Sharon Roberts take? Because Sharon is not the ultimate decision maker, her options are few. She should suggest to Randy that the survey openly ask for respondents' names and state the intended use of this information. If Randy disagrees, Sharon may wish to do the best she can on this job. However, if she finds many practice at Market Info which are inconsistent with universal moral principles, she may want to find a job where she feels more comfortable.
4. What would you do in this situation? What would be your ethical justification?