

IPRO Team Ethics Assignment

Newspaper Article Discussion

Description of Exercise

When working single-mindedly on a project like IPRO, it is easy to forget how what is being done at the bench level connects with the larger ethical issues that are being debated in society, such as issues of patenting, privacy, emerging technologies, health care and education. This exercise seeks to help students see these connections by having them participate in a guided discussion about a set of recent news articles that touch upon some of the larger social implications of their IPRO project.

In collaboration with the Ethics Center Librarian, Kelly Laas (laas@iit.edu) the faculty advisor or a team of students will work to select 2-3 recent news articles that highlight some of the ethical issues in their project. These articles can come from major national or international papers such as the New York Times, reputable blogs like Science 2020 (<http://2020science.org/>) or other sources. Once the articles have been selected, all students in the team will be asked to read and think about the articles before the scheduled class discussion. Kelly Laas should be available to come and help lead the discussion that day. These discussions work best if the faculty advisor is also available that day, both to give an alternative perspective on the articles and to help make sure the group discussions go smoothly.

During the day of discussion, students will be asked to divide up into groups of 4-6 to discuss one of the articles in detail using the Seven Step Method for Ethical Decision Making (see end of document for handout). The Seven Step Method is meant to be a kind of checklist or guide for analyzing these articles. Students should go through steps 1-3, trying to state the major problem in the article, to gather and assess relevant facts (including what information is not included in the article), and to identify the stakeholders in the articles. Students can either be asked to go through steps 4-7, and think about some ways in which the stakeholders in the case could begin to way to begin to address the main ethical issue in the case, or the discussion can focus on how the articles relate to their own work in IPRO and what needs to be done to more fully explore and address these issues.

In the last 10-15 minutes of the allotted time, the team will come back together and a spokesperson for each team will quickly summarize the main points of the article they discussed, and the groups' final consensus on how the major ethical issues in their article could be addressed. Finally each group will write up a short summary of their discussion and answer the questions in the Deliverables section of this document.

Student Competency Level

Beginning – Good for helping students understand how the smaller ethical issues they grapple with in their IPRO connect with larger social issues.

Time Commitment

30-40 Minute meeting with Ethics Librarian to find articles for use in discussion
45 Minutes of in-class time for group discussions
30-40 Minutes preparing group write-up of group discussions.

Tasks Involved

1. Faculty advisor /student representatives work with Kelly Laas to select 2-3 news articles that discuss ethical issues in IPRO.
2. Get copies of articles to IPRO team members to read, 2-3 days before scheduled class discussion.

3. On scheduled day of discussion, students are divided up into groups and assigned a case to discuss. Kelly Laas explains use of Seven Step Method to guide discussion.
4. Student groups spend 30-40 minutes discussion the articles, while faculty advisor and Kelly circulate among the groups.
5. In the last 10-15 minutes, each group nominates a spokesperson to summarize their discussion.
6. Final write-up of discussion, answering questions in deliverables section of this document.

Required Deliverables

The student groups will write a short synopsis of the article they discussed, based on the notes they took during the class discussion. The report should identify the names of the group members, the citation information for the article they discussed, and answers to the following questions

1. What was the main ethical issue at stake in the article?
2. What were the relevant facts in the article, and what needed information was missing?
3. Who are the main stakeholders in the case?
4. Do you think the author of the article was biased in any way? If so, how?
5. What was the final group consensus on the article? What other, alternate viewpoints did you discuss?
6. What would your group recommend to help begin to address or resolve the main ethical issue in your article? Is new regulation needed, should more research be done? Are there specific actions that individuals or organization in your article need to take to begin to resolve this issue?
7. How do you think this article relates to your work in your IPRO project? What actions do you as a team need to take to begin addressing these issues? What advice would you give to future IPRO teams?

Seven Step Method for Ethical Decision Making

1.State the Problem

What is the main issue at stake in this case?

2.Gather and assess relevant facts in the case

At this step it is important to address the non-ethical issues raised within the case. For example, one may need to know the legal constraints of the decision, technical aspects that loom large, or other issues. Since it is impossible to include all facts in a case-study, frequently you will have to make assumptions based on the information you do have.

3. Identifying the stakeholders

At this step, all stakeholders in the decision should be identified. As with Step 1, think broadly and generate a list of all possible individuals, groups, or entities (e.g. the environment) who will be affected by the decisions to be made.

4. Develop list of at least five options

(be imaginative, try to avoid “dilemma” - not “yes” or “no” but who to go to, what to say).

5. Test options, using such tests as the following:

- Harm test - does this option do less harm than any alternative?
- Publicity test - would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?
- Defensibility test - could I defend my choice of this option before a Congressional committee, a committee of my peers, or my parents?
- Reversibility test - would I still think the choice of this option good if I were one of those adversely affected by it?
- Virtue test - what would I become if I choose this option often?
- Professional test - what might my profession's ethics committee say about this option?
- Colleague test - what do my colleagues say when I describe my problem and suggest this option as my solution?
- Organization test - what does the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?

6. Make a tentative choice based on steps 1 -5.

Did you solve the problem with which you began?

7. Make final choice (after reviewing steps 1- 6), act, and then ask:

- What could make it less likely you would have to make such a decision again?
- What precautions can you take as individual (announce policy on question, change job, etc.)?
- What can you do to have more support next time (e.g., seek future allies on this issue)?
- What can you do to change organization (e.g., suggest policy change at next dept. meeting)?
- What can you do to change larger society (e.g. work for new statute or EPA regulation)?

Adapted from Michael Davis, Ethics and the University (Routledge, London, 1999) pp. 166-67.