

APIPA 2020 – Professional Ethics in Action – Exercises

Exercise #1: Hiring

Strategeion was a not-for-profit (NFP) software company founded by a small group of Army veterans. They wanted to create jobs for and improve the lives of veterans through an online platform that allowed the veterans to stay in touch with each other and to share experiences. Strategeion grew steadily consisting of a group of mainly ex-military employees who enjoyed working together and believed in the organization's mission. As a result, job satisfaction was high and there was little turnover.

Strategeion was listed by Wealth Magazine as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" two years in a row. This led to a big surge in job inquiries, especially from civilian candidates. Over 100 applications were submitted for each open position. The Human Resources Department (HR) was quickly overwhelmed.

To assist HR, the Strategeion engineers created PARiS – a system with natural language processing and machine learning capabilities. PARiS identified the best candidates for a given position by looking for markers in resumes. HR trained PARiS using resumes from current and prior employees – marking the resumes as "excellent" or "really bad" in terms of professional attributes and fit.

PARiS was implemented with immediate positive results. HR was thrilled. After a few weeks, the candidate lists produced by PARiS looked just like the ones that HR would have put together (after a much longer time period). Over time, HR and the engineers found less need to check PARiS and allowed it to operate automatically.

Hara was a promising and hard-working computer science student from Athens, Georgia. She crafted her resume to reflect her civic commitments and experience with NFPs that advocate for wheelchair users like Hana. Her submission received an immediate automated rejection from PARiS. This surprised Hara as her strong academic qualifications added to civic activities and NFP experience should have made her a perfect fit. She wrote to the company seeking feedback.

HR was also puzzled by Hara's automated PARiS rejection. They considered her background and credentials to be on par with the very best company employees. HR asked the engineers to take a look and find out why Hara was rejected. The engineers discovered that the answer was "sports." There was a strong positive correlation between participation in athletics and military service. PARiS had learned to connect a history of playing sports with being a "good fit" for Strategeion. Hara had no sports history due to being wheelchair-bound and having no interest in sports.

Given the information provided, consider the following questions and enter your answers below.

1. PARiS promised to make the hiring process more efficient. Are there other values that might also be important? What do organizations risk losing if they focus solely on efficiency?

2. Biased data sets pose a problem for ensuring fairness in AI systems. Given the organization's demographics, what could Strategeion's engineers have done to counteract the skewed employee data? Whose responsibility is it to ensure good data?

Exercise #2: Social Media

Social media have far-reaching effects in society and in organizations. As a result, organizations, including governments, have made attempts to control employee posts in social media.

What is your organization doing?

Question	Response
1. How protected are employees who post in social media? In other words, is it OK to discipline or fire them?	
2. What measures has my organization taken to manage social media?	
3. What problems have we encountered in trying to manage social media for our organization?	

Exercise #3: Data

University of Colorado professor Terrance Boulton received a \$3.3 million government research grant to help the military better identify and thwart terrorists. The project utilized long-range facial recognition in an effort to enable detection of car or vest bombers who are on a watch list.

Professor Boulton created the UnConstrained College Students Dataset into which he placed images of students, employees, and visitors on the university campus. The images were collected by secretly photographing people on the public sidewalks on campus using a camera hidden in a nearby building. The Dataset held 16,000 images of 2,400 people. 1,700 were “matched identities” for which multiple photos of the same individual were taken. The Dataset was eventually released to a Research Consortium 5 years later. It was not considered to hold personal information (just the images) and the data were collected in public areas.

Provide your responses to the questions below.

Question	Response
1. Do we have privacy rights when in public?	
2. What does “personal data” include?	
3. Should we be able to control our personal data?	