Assignment 2: Outline

In making ethical decisions, how much should engineers rely on their own moral judgments rather than established codes of ethics?

Name: Thusitha Dananjaya De Silva Mabotuwana
Student Id: 9790416
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Room: 4.502
Tutor: Racheal Hamed
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- Brief introduction to the discussion. What are morals and what are standard codes of ethics? How do they affect an engineer's day-to-day life and career?
  - Brief outline of some of the important and relevant IPENZ and IEEE professional codes of ethics.
  - Apart from these, we get a set of company ethics we have to abide by while working. In certain situations, a person's morals and personal values might conflict with the established codes of ethics. When faced with such ethical dilemmas, what aspects are generally considered? Short discussion along the lines of personal and family responsibilities, duty to the society, duty to the profession, obligations to the employer and effect on the career. Will be discussing some of the relevant examples from the past, later in the discussion.

- Some of the pros and cons of simply relying on standard codes of ethics and paying less attention to one's own morals and values.
  A paragraph or two on the advantages and disadvantages. For examples:
  - Advantages: Will not have the risk of losing the job due to disputes between higher management and the concerned employee. Employee will be a "team player" and will not be "black-listed" as a "troublemaker".
  - Disadvantages: Will be going against own morals, values and principles. Will have a bad conscience and regrets for doing the job at a latter stage in the career. Also might get blamed, get a bad reputation or even get expelled if legal actions are taken for some bad conduct on the society. Cannot always use the Nuremberg Defense ("I was just following orders") if ethics and morals were totally ignored.

- Short discussion on what someone can do if engaged in an ethical dilemma. Along the lines of:
  - Whistle blowing.
  - Doing nothing or delaying the job (this method can be helpful in unethical or unlawful research projects)
  - Negotiation with concerned parties
  - Going one or a few levels higher in the organisation structure

- Two relevant examples from the past where engineers simply went by the standard codes of ethics and ignored their own morals and expertise in the field.
  - Challenger Disaster: Managers went by the urge to launch the shuttle and other political pressure than listening to their own engineers. Probably the actions taken were not against the standard codes of ethics, but end result was a disaster which grounded the whole shuttle program for years.
  - Ford Pinto Case: The engineers in the company knew that the gas tanks would sometimes blow up if the car was hit from behind, but still they had to go ahead with the design due to Ford's managerial decisions. A lot of money and disgrace could have been saved had the engineers been more ethical and relied more on their personal beliefs, values and expertise in the industry.

- Conclusions
  - A paragraph along the line of how engineers should try to achieve a balance between morals and established codes of ethics while trying to maintain a pleasant working atmosphere. However when this becomes rather difficult, they should think thoroughly and act according to their and the society's best interest.