Name:

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Case Study: **“Troubled Computer Programmer”**

**ANALYSIS PROCESS**

* **UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION**

A. List and number the pertinent facts

**NUMBER FACT**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Programmer has been working for company X for 6 months |
| 2 | X has been tasked with reengineering inventory system of local chain |
| 3 | Supervisor asks programmer for suggestions for existing software |
| 4 | Programmer indicates violation of licensing agreement |
| 5 | Supervisor instructs programmer to install the program anyway |

B. Which of these raises an ethical issue? What is the possible harm?

**Fact Number Possible Harm**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 3 | Teaches programmer unlawful methods are viable business options |
| 5 | Piracy of the software, a form of theft from the developer |
| 5 | The programmer could end up taking the fall and losing his job |
| 5 | X can be sued, as well as lose use of their licensing agreement |
| 5 | ABC Hardware may encounter issues with the software and have no warranty, updates, or experience virus/malware infection |

C. List all of the pertinent stakeholders in this situation.

Programmer

Company X

ABC Hardware

Developers of the software

* **ISOLATE THE ETHICAL DILEMMA**

A. What needs to be resolved immediately?

The supervisor has instructed programmer to perform an illegal action and install software on unauthorized machines, resulting in software piracy

B. Who needs to take action, and what should that action be?

Programmer, who should attempt to take the situation to their supervisor’s supervisor, while also reporting the situation to one of the organization who can be contacted to report software piracy, including: SIIA, ITCCA, BSA, FBI, or the Federation Against Software Theft

* **ANALYZE THE ALTERNATIVES**

1. If action is taken, who will be harmed?

The supervisor would be harmed as they would likely lose their job

1. If action is not taken, who will be harmed?

The programmer may be harmed by taking the fall, X may be harmed legally, and ABC Hardware may be harmed by instability in their system, lack of updates, potential malware infection, and also may encounter legal consequences for using pirated software

1. Does action or inaction result in the least harm?

Action results in the least harm

1. If action is taken, who will benefit?

Programmer may benefit as they showed themselves to be honest and willing to take accountability, X may benefit from discarding a problematic supervisor, and ABC Hardware may benefit by receiving better working, fully functional, and possibly proprietary software.

1. If action is not taken, who will benefit?

X may benefit by having lower costs and higher profit, Supervisor may benefit by receiving acclaim from X for producing higher profit for lower costs, Programmer may benefit by receiving less work and more personal time (though, arguably not a benefit, depending on Programmer’s goals)

* **DECIDE AND IMPLEMENT**

A. Based on your analysis, should action be taken? If so, by whom? If no action is indicated, why is this preferable? How do you ethically justify your decision?

Action should be taken by Programmer. ABC Hardware enlisted the services of X to reengineer their inventory system, and X is contractually obligated to supply the product they agreed to, to the best of their ability. Both parties entered the contract with a mutual understanding of what the likely result would look like. The decision by Supervisor not only breaks the contract X has with ABC Hardware by fraudulently providing a product it did not engineer, but it also breaks the license agreement contract X has with the software developer. There is no moral or ethical justification for arbitrarily breaking a contract previously agreed to, even if it would save on cost, time, and manpower.

B. List the specific steps needed to implement your decision.

* -Programmer reports situation to high-ups and a reporting agency
* -Supervisor gets reprimanded and possibly fired
* -Project is entrusted to another supervisor within the company, or the hiring process needs to begin to fill the position.
* -Inform ABC Hardware of possible delays in the project, and enact any processes which may be contractually agreed to in such circumstances
* -If both parties are still on board, begin development of new inventory system

C. How are the major stakeholders affected by these actions?

Programmer maintains position at the company and has earned trust and respect, possibly leading to future promotion opportunities.

X may lose the contact or get sued for the delay, but will likely maintain the contract and show customer ABC Hardware that they hold themselves accountable when delays occur.

ABC Hardware may need to seek a different contractor if the timeline is severely impacted beyond what’s acceptable, though they would receive a proprietary, reengineered system.

D. What long-term changes would help to prevent a similar dilemma in the future?

Stricter promotion and hiring processes to ensure responsible individuals fill positions in the company. More open communication policies can lead to solving problems as groups rather than a single supervisor having the power to make unethical decisions for the company. A thorough and well-designed development workflow with checks-and-balances implemented in the company will ensure specific steps are taken at specific points in the development of a product, creating greater transparency and making it difficult for underhanded and unethical decisions to be made by lone individuals.