Ethics Assignment (Pentagon Wars DVD)

This report serves to highlight and discuss the unethical incidents observed in the DVD based on the book 'The Pentagon Wars' by Colonel James G. Burton. Unethical behaviour is identified by referring to the requirements of Exit Level Outcome 10 (ELO 10) on Engineering Professionalism (ECSA, 2004).

In the DVD *The Pentagon Wars* (1998), colonel Burton acted professionally and ethically by not compromising his values in order to please those in authority who had different views. He adhered to the requirements of ELO 10 by displaying judgement in decision making during the testing of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV). He showed reasoning in considering the ethical aspects in the context of developing the BFV. He maintained continuous competence in trying to perform proper testing of the BFV regardless of the strong resistance he faced from his general and associates. In doing this, all he cared about was to make sure the vehicle was safe and effective for the soldiers who would use it in battle.

However, despite the colonel's ethical behaviour and determination, there was a great deal of unethical behaviour from his associates which rendered his efforts futile. General Padridge showed unethical behaviour from the start. During his hearing at the committee meeting, his attitude in responding to issues raised against him was not commendable. He showed lack of respect towards the jury and lack of professionalism in the failures he faced in his work. The general's language at work was very unprofessional especially when he first met colonel Burton. He used inappropriate explicit language at the workplace whilst communicating with a member of his team.

Colonel Burton's assistant also showed unprofessional behaviour at the workplace. She sexually harassed the colonel in trying to seduce him and showing intimate interest at the workplace. This is a very common unethical practice in all the industries. However, the Labour Law has a clause which protects employees against this practice. The victims must report such behaviour to the responsible authorities and the law will take its course.

The general and his associates performed in inadequate test for the BFV by using the most ineffective ammunition for the test. After this, they resisted Burton's efforts to counteract this and perform proper testing. They ignored the ethical issues he raised against them just because they wanted to put the BFV into production as soon as possible. The general pushed for the BFV's production without performing proper field testing as he was quoted saying "It will take the test in the field, after production." The general prioritised getting a promotion over the safety of the machines produced. This kind of unethical behaviour can be eliminated by having two or more people who authorise the production of such products and to have rules that stipulate that no production occurs without proper testing and proof.

The earlier generals who initiated the design and development of the BFV also performed unethical acts. The generals' approach towards colonel Robert L. Smith for him to alter the design of the Bradley was not plausible. They went against the engineer's intuition about their desired modifications. They were ignorant towards the implications of their requirements and it made life difficult for Colonel Smith and the engineers. Consequently, the colonel's attitude towards the designer ended up bitter.

In trying to carry out proper tests for the Bradley, Burton faced a lot of unethical acts from the general's associates which avoided him from doing so. They stripped the dummies to avert Burton's mission to prove that the soldiers' clothing were highly flammable in the event that the BFV catches fire. They filled the tanks with water for a test to check the combustibility of the vehicle. The ammunition used to test the Bradley was filled with sand instead of gun powder. All of Burton's efforts were shattered by the general's associates. They created a ruminant procurement department in order to elongate the acquisition of sheep to be used for testing the Bradley's safety and they stopped Burton from accessing the sheep from the test. They thought this would dishearten Burton and consequently he would approve production of the vehicle. All they wanted was quick grant to start production immediately, regardless of the Bradley's safety.

When the general realised that Burton was not going to approve production of the Bradley without proper testing, he reassigned got him to be reassigned to another department. As if that was not enough, they changed the specifications of the Bradley during production because the vehicles were to be sold to other countries not the USA. This was one of the greatest unethical behaviours of the general.

The leaders of the air force also showed unethical behaviour. After Burton had presented his case against the general in the court of law, he was forced to retire and the general and his associates were all promoted.

References

The Pentagon Wars 1998, motion picture, HBO NYC Productions, New York.

Engineering Council of South Africa 2004, *Whole Qualification Standard for BEng/BSc(Eng): NQF Level 7*, (PE-61/E-02-PE), South Africa.