

Case Study 3: Safety and Reliability of Autonomous Vehicles

A Brazilian tech company is testing autonomous delivery vehicles in Rio de Janeiro to reduce traffic congestion and pollution. However, recent tests have shown that vehicles struggle to detect pedestrians in crowded areas, leading to minor accidents. Should the company proceed with public deployment, and what measures should engineers take to ensure safety?



Discussion Questions:

Identifying Stakeholders:

Who are the key stakeholders affected by this decision?

What are the potential impacts (positive and negative) on each stakeholder group?

Balancing Competing Values:

What ethical principles (e.g., privacy, safety, fairness, environmental stewardship) are in conflict in this situation?

How should engineers prioritize these competing values?

Evaluating Responsibilities:

What responsibilities do engineers have to society, the environment, and their employers in this case?

Are there legal, social, or professional obligations that should guide the decision-making process?

Considering Long-Term Consequences:

What are the potential long-term consequences if the engineers proceed with this project as planned?

Could the decision set a precedent for future projects? What might that mean for society?

Exploring Alternative Solutions:

Are there alternative solutions that could mitigate some of the ethical concerns?

What compromises or adjustments could be made to balance stakeholder interests more effectively?

Reflecting on Cultural and Contextual Factors:

How might cultural values in Brazil influence the perception of this ethical dilemma?

Are there specific environmental, social, or economic factors unique to Brazil that should be considered?

Evaluating Transparency and Communication:

How transparent should engineers be about the risks, limitations, or biases in their technology?

What role does public input or consent play in ethical decision-making for these projects?

Learning from Similar Cases:

Can you think of similar cases or examples from other countries or industries? How were they handled?

What lessons can be applied to this situation?

- ☐ What are the ethical issues involved?
- ☐ How might empathy influence the decision-making process in this case?
- ☐ How could educators prepare students to navigate such dilemmas?