



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Automating Her Own Job

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Description

After a year of working for The Workplace, Eve has written a script that can remove errors and produce SQL scripts. Now, when Eve gets a new set of spreadsheets, she can do in 10 minutes what took a previous employee took a month to do, but has not told her employers about this script.

Body

“I spend probably 1-2 hours per week on my job for which I am getting a full time wage” [\(1\)](#) .

The anonymous person (whom we’ll call Eve) making this post to The Workplace website explains that she was hired as a programmer to support a legacy system. Her job is to take a batch of requirements, stored as data in spreadsheets, and write SQL scripts to configure the system based on the requirements. It’s a complicated process, and the analysts creating the spreadsheets “spend a fair bit of time verifying” Eve’s work to ensure that the SQL scripts are correct “because the process is so tedious that it’s easy to make a mistake” [\(1\)](#) . Although it’s boring work, it is a full-time job with a good salary, and it allows Eve to work from home and take care of her son.

It took Eve about a year to figure out all the complications and write software that can remove errors from the spreadsheet and produce the SQL scripts. She can now do in 10 minutes what took the previous employee a month to do. When Eve gets a new set of spreadsheets, she quickly produces the scripts. Every week, she tells her employer that she's completed another part of the job and asks the analysts to verify the SQL scripts. She inserts "a few bugs here and there to make it look like it's been generated by a human" (1). The company has never indicated any dissatisfaction with her job performance.

Questions

1. As a result of Eve developing the job-automating software, what are the benefits and harms to Eve, the analysts, and her employer?
2. Is Eve deceiving her employer? Does that matter?
3. In which respects does Eve exemplify the characteristics of a good employee?
4. In which respects does Eve fail to exemplify the characteristics of a good employee?
5. Eve is a salaried employee; i.e., she is not required to turn in time sheets reporting the number of hours worked. Does Eve have an obligation to tell her employer that she has automated her job?

Original Case

- (1) [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) "Is it unethical for me to not tell my employer I've automated my job?" The Workplace (website), July 2017.
<http://workplace.stackexchange.com/questions/93696/is-it-unethical-for-me-to-not-tell-my-employer-i-ve-automated-my-job>.

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