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In Your Face

A Decision Regarding Privacy
and Technology in a Hiring Process

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Ethical Leadership Case Study Collection
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Table of Contents

Recruitment at a Growing Startup.....	1
Trusting the Process?	2
Questions	3

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Recruitment at a Growing Startup

You are the founder and CEO of a small software development company. Until very recently, you have run the company with four employees out of your bachelor apartment and the neighbourhood coffee-shop. But you have now received, for the first time, a significant amount of money from an outside investor, a venture capitalist who believes in your ideas. You and your team have moved into a new office space downtown, and you are looking to hire 15 to 20 new employees, mostly programmers, but also an office manager and a director of sales and marketing.

The recruiting is handled by yourself and your oldest employee, Louis. Narrowing down from a large number of applicants, you have scheduled a couple of days for interviews with the most promising candidates. Some of them are currently located on the west coast, and, instead of flying them in, you have decided to conduct a first round of interviews via Skype. You only want to fly people in if you are fairly confident that you will end up hiring them. Now Louis suggests that you do a first round of interviews via Skype for all candidates. This will be fairer, he argues, because on screen almost everyone is less personable than in person. It would be a disadvantage for the west coast applicants, if they were the only ones being interviewed via Skype. You agree.

Trusting the Process?

The first day of the interviews goes well. On the second day, you are scheduled to do interviews all day starting at 8 a.m. You arrive at the office at 6:30 to answer a bunch of emails you couldn't attend to during the interviews on day one. At 7:15, Louis enters the office, apparently without noticing you. He goes straight to the computer you use for the interviews, connects a USB key and starts to work. When you walk over to greet him, he seems flustered and hastily disconnects the USB. You ask him what he is doing and he admits that he was installing the Beta version of a program that can analyze blood-flow changes in people's faces when they are on camera, revealing their emotions, and whether they are telling lies. Louis explains that this program is being developed by a professor whom he worked for as a research assistant while he was getting his MSc.

Realizing that Louis has been the first one to arrive at the office the day before, you ask him whether he had used the program during the first day of interviews. "Oh yeah," says Louis, "and it's awesome. That guy Pete, for example, was totally lying whenever he talked about his previous experiences. And one of the women, Lyra, got incredibly anxious when you asked her why she wanted the job and she never got comfortable afterwards. We shouldn't hire either of those two."

You didn't detect any of the things about Lyra and Pete, as claimed by Louis. As you are trying to come to grips with what Louis has done, you are glad that he cannot currently monitor your emotions.

Questions

1. What are the ethical issues raised by Louis' behaviour?
2. Who are the stakeholders, and what do they have at stake?
3. What should you do next?