



ETHICAL ISSUES OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Information ethics has been defined as "the branch of ethics that focuses on the relationship between the creation, organization, dissemination (spread information), and use of information, and the ethical standards and moral codes governs human conduct in society". It provides a critical framework for considering moral issues concerning informational privacy, moral agency, new environmental issues (especially how agent should behave in the info sphere (collection and processing of information)), problems arising from the life-cycle (creation, collection, recording, distribution, processing, etc.) of information (about ownership and copyright, digital divide, and digital rights). Information ethics is related to the fields of computer ethics and the philosophy of information.

Ethical aspects of the information profession are analyzed, including those related to information dissemination (spread information) and use (intellectual property, information access, intellectual freedom, censorship etc...) as well as standard topics of professional practice (negligence, liability). All these problems are observed in the light of modern possibilities and challenges posed by the development of new information and communication technologies. With this in a mind, a proposal is put forward containing the main elements and aspects which should be a part of the training of information professionals. Information Technology is updating the face of contemporary World (already exist). The IT will connect the World at one single platform but it is also helps in the integration of various traditional societies into modern societies.

Information systems raise new and often perplexing (complicated) security and ethical problems. This is truer today than ever because of the challenges posed by the Internet and electronic commerce to the protection of privacy and conceptual property. Information technology has risen to the new possibilities for behavior for which laws and rules of acceptable conduct have not yet been developed. Information technology is introducing changes that create new security and ethical issues for societies to debate and resolve. Increasing computing power, storage, and networking capability including the Internet can expand the availability of individual and organizational actions and magnify their impacts. The easy and anonymity with which information can be communicated, copied, and manipulated in online environments are challenging traditional rules of right and wrong behavior.

Keyword: IT, Perplexing Security, Networking Capabilities, Ethical Issue

ETHICS

Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. The term *ethics* derives from the Ancient Greek word *ethikos*, which is derived from the word *ethos* (habit, "custom"). The branch of philosophy axiology comprises the sub-branches of ethics and aesthetics, each concerned with values.

As a branch of philosophy, ethics investigates the questions "What is the best way for people to live?" and "What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?" In practice, ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality, by defining concepts such as good a devil, right and wrong virtue, and vice, justice and crime. As a field of intellectual enquiry, moral philosophy also is related to the fields of moral psychology, descriptive ethics, and value theory.

Three major areas of study within ethics recognized today are:

1. Meta-ethics, concerning the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions, and how their truth values(if any) can be determined
2. Normative ethics, concerning the practical means of determining a moral course of action
3. Applied ethics, concerning what a person is obligated (or permitted) to do in a specific situation or a particular domain of action

1. ETHICS AND LAW

Ethics defines what is good for an individual as well as for the society and establishes the nature of duties that people owe themselves and one another. Human beings have the ability, partly innate and partly acquired, to judge human actions as morally good or bad, right or wrong. Even though "good / right" and "bad / wrong" do not mean the same thing for all still, everyone possesses a notion of right and wrong. Early morning music practice or use of insecticides/

repellents in her house, for example, though is very much ethical to my next-door neighbor; they are certainly not so to me! These differences again are not only individual but also cultural. Polygamy, for example, is a normal behavior and well acceptable to Muslims whereas not so for Hindus! Of course, in spite of all sorts of diversified opinions, ethics have a universal component. Killing an innocent person, for example, is not morally acceptable to anyone of us irrespective of our culture and belief. Though law often embodies ethical principles, law and ethics are far from co-extensive. In an ideal world, the moral and legal acts may mean the same but they are not same in the real world. Many acts that would be widely condemned as unethical are not prohibited by law and the reverse is also equally true. Not helping one's friend when he/she is in need, for example, may not seem to be moral but not violation of any law too. Our state forbids recruitment of a non-reserved category candidate against few reserved category seats but, does not it contradict the overt moral imperative that there should be no discrimination among people based on cast, creed, religion and color? Though it would be exaggerating and skeptical to infer that there is no connection altogether between ethics and the law but at most what the law will give us is a rough indication of practices, rather than an absolute criterion, valid for a particular place at a particular time deemed socially desirable, partly for moral reasons and partly for others.

1. ETHICAL, LEGAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF ICT

Every technological invention has got both positive and negative



impacts on the society. Einstein while giving the nuclear power theory as has never expected that his discovery shall ever be used for such a devastating destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it too was not known during the 19th that communication technology of late shall have so many alarming direction associated with it.

2. Privacy, Integrity, Security and Protection of Information & the Internet Privacy means providing confidentiality to our personal data. One may not like, for example, to make public one's insurance details, medical history etc. Information Integrity means the information provided should be relevant, complete, up-to-date, trustworthy and available in time. A job alert after the recruitment is over or without the address of the employer or to a student who is in his/her high school, for example, is hardly of any use. Security and protection concerned with protection against accidental or intentional destruction or disclosure of data and programs by unscrupulous persons and in case data loss occurs how to recover it. The Internet is a global technology network (WAN) made up of many smaller contributing networks (LANs, MANs, CANs etc.) to support the open exchange of information among many different kinds of institutions, organizations and individuals all over the world. Internet, no doubt, is a boon to the present society by providing answers to almost every problem and need of

mankind but at the same time, can be its greatest enemy as well.

ETHICS IN INFORMATION:

Information ethics has been defined as "the branch of ethics that focuses on the relationship between the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information, and the ethical standards and moral codes governing human conduct in society". It provides a critical framework for considering moral issues concerning informational privacy, moral agency (e.g. whether artificial agents may be moral), new environmental issues (especially how agents should behave in the info sphere), problems arising from the life-cycle (creation, collection, recording, distribution, processing, etc.) of information (especially ownership and copyright, digital divide, and digital rights). Information ethics is related to the fields of computer ethics^[2] and the philosophy of information.

Dilemmas regarding the life of information are becoming increasingly important in a society that is defined as "the information society". The explosion of so much technology has brought information ethics to a forefront in ethical considerations. Information transmission and literacy are essential concerns in establishing an ethical foundation that promotes fair, equitable, and responsible practices. Information ethics broadly examines issues related to ownership, access, privacy, security, and community. It is also concerned with relational issues such as "the relationship between information and the good of society, the relationship between information providers and the consumers of information".

Information technology affects common issues such as copyright protection, intellectual freedom, accountability, privacy, and security. Many of these issues are difficult or impossible to resolve due to fundamental tensions between Western moral philosophies (based on rules, democracy, individual rights, and personal freedoms) and the traditional Eastern cultures (based on relationships, hierarchy, collective responsibilities, and social harmony). The multi-faceted dispute between Google and the government of the People's Republic of China reflects some of these fundamental tensions.

Professional codes offer a basis for making ethical decisions and applying ethical solutions to situations involving information provision and use which reflect an organization's commitment to responsible information service. Evolving information formats and needs require continual reconsideration of ethical principles and how these codes are applied. Considerations regarding information ethics influence "personal decisions, professional practice, and public policy". Therefore, ethical analysis must provide a framework to take into consideration "many, diverse domains" (ibid.) regarding how information is distributed.

ETHICAL ISSUES OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Ethics is something that is universal to the human condition but this is not where we try to explain its origin or justify its ubiquity. Instead we take these as given and explore how it impacts people and businesses who are involved with information technology. Wendell Berry, farmer and philosopher, had famously said that "If you eat, you're

involved in agriculture" and for us in the age of Google, it is but a little stretch to conclude that "If you use a computer or a smart phone, you're involved with information technology". So the issues of ethics in information technology are as universal as ethics in general. However in this section we will first look at issues confronting information technology professionals and then look at some broader and more fundamental issues that concern the population at large.



Information Technology Professionals

In its early days, India as a nation with a burgeoning population and cheap labor was a hesitant user of what was viewed as labor-saving computers and even today the level of penetration of this technology is low when compared to the more mature economies. However the profession exploded into the mindscape of the Indian population on the back of the immense employment opportunities that surfaced prior to the Y2K scare -- when panicky American companies were on a desperate search for computer programmers to make changes to ancient computer programs that were expected to malfunction at the turn of the century and bring the computer dependent economy to a grinding halt. Whether the panic in the US was justified or not, the fallout for India was very beneficial as hundreds of companies took advantage of

the opportunity to not only earn a lot of immediate money but also to lay the foundation of a vibrant profession that is anchored by mega-corporations like TCS, Infosys, Cognizant and Wipro that employs lakhs of programmers today.

While programmers are the most visible members of the IT community, the range of people who claim to be IT professionals is quite diverse. At one end we have the mathematicians who practice computer science while at the other we have people who install and repair our laptops and in between we have programmers, systems analysts, architects, network specialists, database administrators, hardware engineers and many other job descriptions. Unlike doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants and company secretaries there is no statutory body that certifies a person as an IT professional nor is there any specific educational qualification that is either necessary or sufficient for a person perform any of these roles. So the definition of an IT professional can be expanded to include anyone who delivers a product or service related to digital devices including but not limited to computers, telephones, gaming consoles, industrial equipment and other components of a modern society.

Once we have identified an IT professional it is easier to identify the categories of people that the professional interacts with and the ethical issues that emerge with each kind of interaction.

Employers	Software Piracy, Trade Secret and Whistle blowing
Clients	Fraud, Misrepresentation and Breach of Contract
Suppliers	Bribery

Other IT professionals	Resume Inflation, Conflict of Interest
IT users and society at large	Code of Ethics, Certification and Malpractice

Many of these issues are certainly not unique to IT professionals but some of them are more common in their occurrence because of the nature of products and services provided by the IT industry.

For example:

- **Software Piracy:** Software is a key “tool” or “equipment” that is used to deliver software services and very often an employer encourages the employee to use pirated software tools to deliver services. Such a scenario is extremely unlikely in other professions where the use of stolen tools like screwdriver, spanner, wrench or stolen machinery is highly improbable.
- **Trade Secrets:** While designs of products and the machinery required to create and deliver them are always closely guarded in any organization, the nature of the products in the IT industry is such that they are far easier to copy, retain and transmit through widely used communication channels. This leads to greater risks.
- **Resume Inflation:** Given the large number of people in the IT business, the similarity of backgrounds and qualifications among them and the fact that almost every company has large requirements of largely similar people -- for example Java Programmers or SAP consultants, the rate at which people change jobs is very high in the IT business. In fact, IT professionals are said to be more loyal to the profession than to the organization! In this volatile scenario of rapid recruitment to counter high employee turnover it is very



difficult to verify the competence and credentials of job applicants adequately.

- **Conflict of Interest:** The high turnover of IT professionals also results in situation where colleagues working for the same company very often find themselves in competing companies and personal relationships can and does fall foul of professional relationships. Somebody who was your boss and mentor, someone whom you admire and respect, is now working for rival. So could be the case with a spouse or the “significant other” since relationships within the industry are very common. In this case, the nature and quantum of information that you can share is very debatable.
- Most of these issues can be categorized into three major areas of concern: Intellectual Property, Privacy and Freedom of Information that we explore in greater detail in subsequent sections. However what makes the issues difficult to address is the fact that from a legal perspective, IT workers are not recognized as professionals since there is no statutory mechanism to “license” them to practice as in the case with doctors -- the Medical Council of India, lawyers -- The Bar Council of a particular court or chartered accountants -- The Institute of Chartered Accountants. As a consequence there is no statutory body that can adjudicate on the correctness of their behavior. Nor is there any legally enforceable code of conduct -- other than the law of the land -- against which debatable behavior can be measured which in turn means that an IT professional cannot be held legally liable for professional malpractice. However this is equally true for many other service lines like banking, insurance or even education but unfortunately that is no excuse to either duck the debate on ethics in the IT

industry or, what is worse, use it as a fig-leaf to hide behavioral traits that are indeed unethical.

CONCLUSION

Learn to differentiate between public and private, when in doubt, play safe and obtain consent w Respect privacy of participants of online studies w Anonymity comes at the cost of accuracy, so learn to balance between the two w Copyrights and plagiarism apply to Internet as much as to print publications Ethical issues should not kill creativity on Internet w It is our moral duty to publish truthful, unbiased information on Internet.

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