

Social and ethical issues in computing

[Science](#), [Computer Science](#)



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Introduction

Information technology has revolutionized over the years and thereby bringing in some peripheral issues. Most prevalent of which can be categorized as social and ethical issues. In this report, I will discuss how these issues affect professionals and how they could approach these challenges to try and find feasible solutions for them. Some of the social factors to be discussed include: dependency, social justice and digital divide. Ethical issues such as privacy, copyright and computer crime will also be discussed.

The growth and development of the internet has made it possible to store a large number of individual's personal data by relying on advanced information Technology. This has however, in some cases resulted in the abuse of personal data and privacy violations. Today, forging digital documents such as counterfeiting signatures, digital images etc. is an important topic in the field of information security and computer ethics. Ugboogbo and Atu (2016) define ethics as a reflection of morality. It refers to the principles of right and wrong in making choices by individuals. It has

been described as the art and science that seeks to bring sensitivity and methods to the discernment of moral values. Cases such as cyber bullying and communication with anonymous individual, visiting them sharing the stimulating content on the internet, and sharing personal information on the internet have been recognized as the dangers of internet communications in the new era.

Background to issues

A clear definition of the concept of Information Technology is vital, as Currie shows, there is a great disparity between the extents to which clear concepts apply in the field such as chemistry compared to the academic discipline of management.” for example, physical chemists know exactly what they mean by ‘ entropy’. Would be scholars in the management field, on the other hand, have no shared precise meaning for many of their relevant concepts, for example ‘ role’, ‘ norm’, ‘ culture or ‘ Information Technology’ all these terms are often fuzzy as a result of their unreflective use in everyday chat”.

Many management scholars agree that the concept of defining Information Technology is highly complex and the approach of Rainer is a clear example of this. She understands the concept of Information Technology to be broad incorporating any number of activities that include the use of Information Technology to support operations. “ It has been said that the purpose of Information Technology is to get information to the right people at the right time in the right amount and the right format”.

According to Schultz ethical issues dates as far back as the Greek times but nowadays ‘ ethics’ is an inclusive term for concerns also referred to as “

morality”, “ value”, and “ justice.” Besides character, ethics in this inclusive sense is also concerned with the rightness and wrongness of actions, the value of goodness of things and situations, and with the justness of institutions Schultz. The basic terms of ethics are; right, good and just.

Identification of issues

The extent to which ethical issues impact upon Information Technology depends on everyone’s responsibility in whatever they do. A study on the relationship between ethics and Information Technology has defined ethics as “ the principles of right and wrong that individuals, acting as free moral agents, use to make choices that guide their behaviours”. The study argues that the development of Information Technology has fundamentally transformed the relationship between management and ethics because new Information Systems give rise to a series of new ethical dilemmas. The study argues that “ information systems raise new ethical questions for both individuals and societies because they create opportunities for intense social change, and thus threaten existing distributions of power, money, rights, and obligations”.

Many of the ethical problems of Information Systems were foreseen by Mason in a famous study conducted in 1986 entitled ‘ Four Ethical Issues of the Information Age’. In this study Mason argues that there will be above all four ethical issues that will dominate the era in which information Systems will dominate. He defined four ethical issues, namely “ privacy, accuracy, property and accessibility”. Mason raised a number of pertinent questions that are indeed still relevant today and help us greatly in our quest to

understand the relationship between legal, ethical and social issues and Information Systems. For example, with regard to privacy Mason asked, “What information about one’s self or one’s associations must a person reveal to others, under what conditions and with what safeguards? What things can people keep to themselves and not be forced to reveal to others?” At this point it is important to point out that whilst such questions are clearly ethical questions in nature, the answers that society provides to such questions have clear and profound social dimensions and therefore the relationship between ethical and social issues is inextricably linked with regard to Information Systems.

As the study on Ethical and Social Issues points out, “like other technologies, such as steam engines, electricity, the telephone, and the radio, information technology can be used to achieve social progress, but it can also be used to commit crimes and threaten cherished social values. The development of information technology will produce benefits for many and costs for others”.

According to Forouzan and Mosharraf, three common ethical issues are; privacy, copyright and computer crime. Invasions of privacy are highly likely because communication is electronically done between two or more parties. Crackers can intervene and use information to their advantage. Producers of music and movies are losing out when people illegally download their songs or movies without paying.

Conclusion

Information Technology has greater importance in an organization. It is necessary for an organization to achieve competitive advantage and to achieve the goals of the organization. The same technology can be used to cheat people. It all depends on the users of information technology. The management has the sole responsibility to check how the information technology has been utilized by the individuals so that it yields good result for the organization. The management has to ensure that the resources are utilized for doing ethical activities. They have to ensure that no fraudulent activities have been done with the information technology. For that the organization or company should have some values and principles. The company should follow some code of ethics so that the employees are aware of the company policies so that it yields good name to the company also a good reputation among general public. Also the company or organization have to ensure that the company is working as per the rules and regulations of the government and its activities are based on the laws and regulations enforced by the local jurisdiction. Therefore it is important to have a very good knowledge of ethics and the corporate has some responsibility towards the society. Every individual who uses information system should have to understand the importance of ethics and should inculcate a good code of ethical conduct in all his activities. Some of the codes of conduct which an organization or an individual has to do are the following:

- Contribute to society and Human well being
- Avoid Harm to others
- Be Honest and trust worthy

- Be fair and take action not to discriminate
- Honor property rights including copyrights and patents
- Give proper credit for intellectual property
- Respect privacy of others
- Honor confidentiality.

Only if there is a good ethical theory we can take a good others ethical decision. Treating others with respect is very important and vital for every individual. As per saying give respect and take respect. Today we live in an information society and in order to gain the greatest advantages in the modern market place, we need to be able to access the available information effectively. Every technological innovation, from paper through to the modern computer, has broadened the spectrum of learning necessary to attain peak literacy levels. In our current information society, the minimum requirements for true literacy are: intellectual skills; technology and access. Intellectual skills are the result of education, and include reading, writing and comprehension skills as well as the ability to reason, calculate and solve complex problems through the application of analytical thought processes. Information is of no use if one has not the intellectual skills to unlock its potential. Only thing is that everything has to be used ethically should be capable of developing the society.