Chapter 2
Ethics and Social Responsibility: Critical Success Factors in Digital Transformation Processes

Pedro Fernandes da Anunciação
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7116-5249
Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, Setúbal, Portugal

Antonio Juan Briones-Peñalver
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2893-007X
Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain

Juan Andres Bernal-Conesa
Centro Universitario de La Defensa, Spain

Francisco Madeira Esteves
Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, Setúbal, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Ethics is an important social and technological issue. The powerful computer capabilities provide new frontiers of economic and social human activities. Information, about employees, consumers, and markets, becomes more relevant when it enables economic decisions and impacts on the organization's competitiveness. Recent examples such as fake news show a necessity of a comprehensive and multidimensional economic and social approach to frame the use of algorithms and technologies to guarantee suitable ethical patterns in the information society. It is important to analyze the sensibility of economic stakeholders to the ethical limits of information collection and treatment about consumers and technology users. The aim of the present study was to evaluate the proposed model for ethical analysis through a proof of concept applied to a Portuguese energy operator, framing the identification and mitigation of the ethical risks associated with the continuous digital transformation process.

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INTRODUCTION

Information technologies are not 100% reliable. They are insecure because they are vulnerable to attackers. They can either be attacked directly, to disrupt their services, or they can be abused in clever ways to do the bidding of an attacker as a dysfunctional user (Bronk et al., 2013). Because of this, among other reasons, the ethics issue has taken a clear economic and social dominance. Various news associated with easy access, availability of data and information about consumers and economic organizations or the generation of fake news in the economic context are examples of situations that have justified the importance of ethics and social responsibility as two dimensions of increasingly relevant in the economy and society.

Eric Schmidt, Chief Executive of Google, has issued a stark warning over the amount of personal data people leave on the Internet and suggested that many of them will be forced one day to change their names in order to escape their cyber past. The Internet is the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn't understand, the largest experiment in anarchy we've ever had (Taylor, 2010).

The theme of ethics and social responsibility in this technological context of the digital economy and society, is currently a topic of study and research extremely opportune and relevant in the sociological and economic domain. Moral economy is thus an ethical and political as well as a scientific approach, and as such it would seem to complement the social quality approach (Elder-Vass, 2015). Each new information technology, for sure, takes a step forward in the history of human civilization (Maggiolini, 2014). The great challenge focuses on the balance between opportunities for technological innovation, the behavior of society and confidence in economic transactions. The recent report entitled «People, Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report» shows the general feeling of people regarding some aspects of today's society, namely (Doteveryone, 2018):

- The Internet has had a strongly positive impact on our lives as individuals, but people are less convinced it has been beneficial for society. 50% say it has made life a lot better for people like themselves and only 12% say it's had a very positive impact on society;
- There is a major understanding gap around the technologies. Only a third of people are aware that the data they have not actively chosen to share has been collected. A quarter has no idea how Internet companies make their money;
- People feel disempowered by a lack of transparency in how online products and services operate. 89% want clearer terms and conditions and half would like to know how their data is used but can't find out;
- There is a public demand for greater accountability from technology companies. Two-thirds say that government should be helping ensure companies treat their customers, staff and society fairly.

The disruption of democracy is a reality, arising from the technological revolution. The treatment of massive amounts of information associated with digital platforms gives individuals and organizations, in an easy way, instruments to circumvent the democratic principles on which our societies have traditionally sustained (Vergílio, 2019). The strong technological context and the lack of a broad consensus regarding the relevance of this topic, in the professional and social conduct of most information technology users, has resulted in a regulatory vacuum of principles, rules, and values essential to the framing of postures and practices in a digital context. Democracies are being gamed (Moore, 2018).